

HOW TO WRITE A RESEARCH PROPOSAL



OVERVIEW

- What is a research proposal?
- Organising a research proposal
- Writing the research proposal

WHAT IS A RESEARCH PROPOSAL?

- A document written for a thesis/dissertation
- A statement of intent. It outlines what you propose to do and why your research should take place

WHY A PROPOSAL?

You need to convince your readers that:

- Your research topic/issue warrants further investigation
- That it is a significant issue and that further research will uncover more information on the issue
- You have chosen appropriate methods for studying the problem
- You are the right person to do it (knowledgeable and confident)

LENGTH

Will vary depending on:

- The purpose of your research
- University requirements, discipline, and topic

The total page count can vary significantly. For example, it could be 10-15 pages or 75 pages. We recommend:

- Reading your department guide
- Discussing it with your lecturer/supervisor
- Writing concisely but without losing the meaning

DEFINING YOUR RESEARCH TOPIC

- What are you interested in?
- What question/s do you want to answer?
- What contribution will it make? This can include how your research will challenge or contribute to existing knowledge on the topic
- Are you will to study this for several years?

ORGANISING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

What sections are included in a research proposal?

Title of study

Introduction

- The problem

Literature review

Methodology

- Research design
- Data analysis

Ethical Statements

Timeframe

Budget

References

TITLE OF STUDY

- Reflects what your study is about (not too general)
- Clearly indicates your topic and the key issues/concepts you want to explore
- Encapsulates what you intend to do
- Should be no more than 15 words
- Should be catchy and attention-grabbing
- May change as you progress

INTRODUCTION

- Acquaints reader with topic
- May begin with a historical overview or background context (how your chosen topic fits within that)
- Why you are interested in the study
- Statement of the problem

THE PROBLEM

- Rationale or significance
- Statement of the problem
 - State clearly and briefly
 - May be a question or a statement
- Hypothesis/Thesis
- Delimitations (boundaries that have been set for the study)
 - Do not promise more than what is necessary

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Purpose:

- What is the purpose/overall aim of your research?
- What objectives do you expect to achieve?
- What specific research question/s will be addressed?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY CONTINUED

Significance:

- Why is the research important?
- What is your study's contribution to the field of knowledge?
- What are its wider implications or uses?

EXAMPLE: FILIPINO WOMEN WRITERS IN SPANISH: A LITERARY HISTORY AND ANTHOLOGY (1900-1969)

The evolution of feminist criticism in literature has contributed much to the study of women's writings and the experiences they depict....Certainly, except perhaps for the last decade, women's literature in the Philippines was not conscious of the feminist agenda. Alburo (1994) claims that early works [by women] were written from the margins. But the feminist perspective has enabled readers to become aware of this inequality and, consequently, generated much scholarly interest in women's studies. In the last ten years alone...

However, surprisingly, previous to known Filipina writers in English, Filipino, or the various vernacular languages, no research is found on the Filipina writers of Spanish. Although the society was decidedly more patriarchal then, it seems impossible that no works were written by our "foremothers."

It is, thus, the intention of this study to make known the foremost Filipina writers of Spanish. For instance, not many are familiar with the names Evangelina Guerrero-Zacarias, Nilda Guerrero-Barranco, and Adelina Monasterio Gurrea. They were considered important and major writers of their time yet in the study of the country's literary history, they remain silent and unrecognised. They wrote in Spanish, with significant literary contributions, but they are not even included in the roster of women writers in Philippine literature classes. Who were they? What did they write? Did their writing reflect the social, political, and moral issues and concerns of their time? Did their literature develop with the times and with their male counterparts?

(Sevillano, 1998)

EXAMPLE: NUTRITIONAL STATUS OF MIGRANT MAINLAND CHINESE CHILDREN IN AUCKLAND

Introduction

Children are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society. The New Zealand Ministry of Health has emphasised the importance of nutrition and physical activity to the growth and development of children in New Zealand. Children living in New Zealand come from a variety of different countries, with their own natural traditions and beliefs about food and health (Ministry of Health, 1997). The number of migrants in New Zealand arriving from Mainland China has increased in recent years (Statistics New Zealand, 1997)...

Childhood diet influences the long-term health of the child. An understanding of the food habits of migrant Mainland Chinese children, their cultural background and the transition in their dietary practices and lifestyle is important when making nutrition recommendations, designing nutrition education materials, and counselling immigrant Mainland Chinese families about nutrition. However, a question arises: what do we know about the nutritional status of Mainland Chinese children? At present, limited data is available on children including migrant Mainland Chinese school age in New Zealand with regard to their dietary intake and nutritional status (Ministry of Health, 1997). The only study that has been done was on a small sample of 17 pre-school Chinese children in Dunedin (Soh et al., 2000). Nothing is known about the determination of food choices and dietary acculturation among migrant Mainland Chinese children in older age groups in New Zealand.

The objectives of this survey are:

- To assess the food and nutrient intake, activity levels and body composition of 50 migrant Chinese children aged between 7 to 10 years of age, who were born in Mainland China.
- To compare the results with data from European children of the same age in New Zealand.
- To assess the accuracy and applicability of a food frequency questionnaire designed to assess nutrient intake in New Zealand European, Māori and Pacific children when used in New Zealand Chinese children.
- To suggest, if necessary, dietary and lifestyle modifications that could improve the long-term health of migrant Mainland Chinese children living in New Zealand. (Lu, 2002, pp.1—2).

HYPOTHESIS

- Shrewd guess, assumption, informed judgement, or inference to explain observed facts or conditions
- Rare for a study to not involve some hypothesis
- One or more may be generated through analysis of the background of the research problem

DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Your choices
- Boundaries of the study that are imposed by the nature of the problem being studied
- Integral to the research design: sets the parameters and tells the reader what will and will not be included, and why

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Reviews the written work on and around your topic
- Identifies your study's contribution to the field of knowledge
- Demonstrates the relationship of your research to other local and international research in the field
- Discusses improvements in the field and what is already known
- Points out gaps and weaknesses in previous studies

For more information, see the [OWLL page on literature reviews.](#)

METHODOLOGY

Describes not only the way in which data is collected (practical) but may include the discussion of theoretical issues relating to research methods

METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH DESIGN 1

- Tells the reader ‘how’ you will be doing your study
- Tells the reader ‘why’ you are doing it that way (justifying your choices regarding methodology and research design)
- Demonstrates the reasons behind your choice of:
 - Methodological standpoints
 - Methodological approaches
 - Techniques for data collection and analysis
- Justifies your choice of one approach over another and its consequences for the research

METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH DESIGN 2

- Your research questions guide the inquiry process:
 - Will you use instruments or tools to gather data? Demonstrate the link between your research question/s and the tools you will use
- Include the practice/theoretical/conceptual framework you will employ

DATA ANALYSIS

Indicate how you will:

- Break down data for understanding
- Present results
- Use statistical tests (if any)
- Employ methods to prove your hypothesis

ETHICS SECTION

Covers specific ethical issues of your research.

Indicate how you will:

- Conform to the relevant ethical codes (e.g. Massey University research ethics guidelines but also governmental/committee codes if applicable)
- Protect confidentiality, anonymity, and the physical and mental wellbeing of participants

TIMEFRAME OF STUDY AND BUDGET

- Timeline for the study
 - Times and dates for each step of your research process
 - Be as specific as possible
- Budget estimate of costs involved in your study (need not be too detailed)
 - Costs that will be incurred (e.g. conference travel, compensation for research participants)
 - Indicate source of funds

RESEARCH PROPOSAL SAMPLE TIMETABLE

Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	Literature Review	Literature Review	Literature review	Update and refine literature review	Refine sections	Refine results section	Draft intro	Draft conclusion	Editing
	Specify guide questions	Select strategy and methods	Write methods section	Data collection	Data analysis	Refine discussion section	Finalise discussion	Finalise reference list	Submit
	Select strategy and methods	Pilot research tools	Data collection	Draft results section	Draft discussion section		Editing	Editing	
		Analyse ethical issues							

PRIMARY REFERENCES

- Highlight appropriate texts cited in your proposal
- Supervisor guidance for other essential texts
- Never underestimate the value of a good reference list

WRITING THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

- Well-structured
- Clear, concise, and to the point
- Paragraph organisation. Follow:
 - P** - Point sentence/controlling idea
 - I** - Illustration, Evidence
 - E** - Explanation, Elaboration
- Avoid long paragraphs of 300+ words
- One main idea = one paragraph

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- Academic writing development
- Understanding assignment questions
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- Enhancing study skills, like:
 - Reading techniques
 - Notetaking
 - Time management skills
 - Critical thinking, reading & writing

MASSEY UNIVERSITY

CAMPUS LOCATIONS:

Palmerston North - Manawatu: Centre for Learner Success
Student Centre Level 2, Manawatu Campus

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Albany: Centre for Learner Success
Level 3, Library, Albany Campus

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Wellington: Centre for Learner Success
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