The research proposal

**What is the purpose of the research proposal?**

- The proposal is the planning and designing.
- The research is the executing and reporting.

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**Thinking about the proposal**

- **What's involved**
  - Literature, research group, community
  - Worth researching
- **Completed in time**
- **Research proposal**
  - Lends itself to being researched
  - Sufficiently challenging
  - Why I can do it
  - Have knowledge, interest, expertise

(Cyser, 2006)

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**The purpose for the research community and yourself as a researcher**

- To get approval (and scrutiny!)
- Foundational document about your research
  - May be drawn on for ethics applications, scholarship / funding applications.
  - Safeguard for universities
  - Groundwork for thesis/Helps prepare student for what is ahead
    - Defining and communicating research aims clearly
    - Planning and action
    - Identifying resources
    - Anticipating difficulties

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**Planning**

Coolbear (1995, cited in Hampton, Emerson & MacKay, 1999) identifies 7 key steps in the planning stage of a research proposal:

- Identifying the research area
- Reviewing the relevant literature
- Identifying the specific research issue
- Clarifying the limits of the research question, which will help to identify the research aims and objectives
- Designing the study
- Preparing timetable
- Writing the proposal

**Scope**

- Expense
- Logistics
- Feasibility of gathering enough students
- Getting permission
- Ethics
- Training
- So what
- Too broad
- Too specific
- Availability of equipment
- Time frames

**TASK 1**
Key questions

- **WHAT** questions are you trying to answer?
- **HOW** will you answer them?
- **WHY** is it worth doing?

Original contribution

- A question not answered previously
- Applying existing theory to a new context
- A new research design
- Synthesise issues that were previously discipline specific

How the research question is derived

- Why it is important
- How it fits in with other studies
- Where it comes from
  - Who initially raised it?
  - What has been discovered so far?
  - How has the question evolved?
  - What methods of investigating have been employed?
  - How well have they worked? 
  (Locke, Spirduso & Silverman, 2004)

Narrowing down your focus (Punch, 2000)

- Research area
  - Pre empirical
  - Answers
  - Empirical
- Topic
- General questions
- Specific questions
  - Data analysis
  - Data collection
  - Design

Example-focusing in on questions

- Immigration in New Zealand
  - Consistency of immigration policies across different nationalities
  - Is the immigration policy on family reunification applied consistently to applicants from Argentina, Korea and Tonga?
  - Now how would you measure this?
  - (Manolo & Trafford, 2004)

Examples

- Are advertised T.V snacks highly influential in children’s diets?
- Are unhealthy snacks being disproportionately advertised to children at peak viewing times?
- What is the relationship between family background and incidence of youth suicide?
- What is the relationship between parental break up and incidence of youth suicide?
  - TASK2-Distinguishing general and specific questions
Can’t think of a topic

- What are your interests?
  - Work/community/hobbies/voluntary work
- What research have you done before
  - Essays/projects
- Think of a title
  - Empire strikes back
- Go with your hunch
- Use mind maps
  - Helps explore ideas/bigger picture
  - Once you have identified an area you at least have a body of literature

(Network, Hughes & Tight, 2000)

Network—always be on the look out

- Talk to everyone and anyone
- Attend as many seminars/conferences are possible
- Correspond with other institutes/researchers
- Other theses

Reading

- Reading must be purposeful—have a plan
  - Who are some of the most important researchers that have written on this topic?
  - What major themes do they deal with?
  - Is X dealt with by any of these authors?
  - Are there any differing points of view on this theme? How and in what ways?
  - What are other areas of disagreement where this topic is concerned
    Know when to stop!

- (Manalo & Trafford, 2004)

Getting started

- A brief focus on key questions
  - Confront central questions
- Ideas paper
  - Write all ideas/context/background then develop questions

  Just need to get writing!

(Punch, 2000)

Pruning

- Too many topics
  - see where they lead
- Too many questions
  - Categorize,
  - prioritize,
  - hierarchy

Better to do small well than large superficially

(Punch, 2000)

The donut and swiss roll effect

- (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2000)
References