

WRITING YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSAL

A WORKBOOK FOR FIRST TIME AND
INEXPERIENCED RESEARCHERS IN THE SOCIAL
SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

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Updated versions of this guide and supplementary materials available
online from <http://www.nrf.ac.za/methods/proposals.htm>

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Expect...

- ... to make mistakes and to learn.
- ... to write and rewrite your research proposal several times! Nobody gets it right the first time!
- ... to spend many hours reading books and journals relating to your topic!
- ... to spend many hours discussing your research with other researchers or your supervisor if you have one.
- ... to have your work criticized.
- ... to feel confused and perhaps even hopeless at times.

But, if you follow the guidelines in this manual carefully, you can expect ...

- ... to produce a highly professional research proposal.
- ... to have a happier and more successful research experience.



Research proposals have many different functions. Some of these are:

- To *convince* other people, like other researchers, research funding agencies, educational institutions, and supervisors, that your research is worth spending scarce resources on. You convince people of the value of your work by showing them how your research will make a difference to the world, or by identifying a dilemma in existing theory which your research will help resolve.
- To *demonstrate expertise* in a particular area of study. You want to convince people that you have enough understanding of the research topic to be able to do the research properly. You do this by intelligently summarizing, comparing and integrating all the relevant theory and existing research pertaining to your topic.
- To *demonstrate competency* in a particular area of study. It is also vital that your proposal convinces the reader that you have all the necessary skills to carry out the proposed study. You do this by describing an appropriate and feasible research method.
- To *serve as a contract*. Research often involves contracts between different individuals or groups or people. The proposal states clearly what each party is expected to bring

to the research, how resources will be used, and when the research should be completed.

- To serve as a *planning tool*. Many research projects fail because they are not properly planned. Even when badly planned research does eventually reach its conclusion, it is typically very stressful to the researcher. When a clear plan of action is in place from the beginning the research is much more likely to proceed smoothly and to be successful.

HINT:

Because the main purpose of the research proposal is to *convince* your reader, it is important that you adopt a writing style that is clear and professional. Notes about style and presentation are included later.



Well, first you need a clear *research question*. Researchers get their research questions from many different places.

○ *Observation of the world*

Often a researcher will notice a peculiarity in their world and start to wonder about it. Sometimes this produces a research question.

Carl Gustav Jung provides an interesting example in the social sciences. Jung observed that his patients' dreams contained various common themes, and that these "archetypes" could also often be identified in the mythologies, stories, literature and art work of many different cultures. From this fundamental observation an entire school of psychological theory, research and practice has emerged.

In South Africa, the scientist Prof. Malegapuru Makgoba says that his "foundation and orientations towards the sciences were well-established in the village and country-side where nature in its totality was a big laboratory." *

* Makgoba, M.W. 1997. Mokoko: the Makgoba Affair. Florida Hills: Vivlia.

○ *Theory*

In many areas of the social sciences and humanities there exist competing theories. That is, different theories that explain the same phenomenon in different ways. By examining the different theories carefully it is possible to design research questions which will help us to understand which theory is more accurate. Thus, conflicting theoretical positions are an important source of research questions.

Perhaps the most famous example of conflicting theories generating a wealth of new research and knowledge comes from the realm of physics. The work of scientists like Max Planck and Ernest Rutherford produced an apparent paradox. They demonstrated that light displayed the characteristics of both a stream of particles and a wave. The fact that these two models are mutually incompatible, led physicists to question the most fundamental principles of classical physics resulting in the birth of a whole new area of scientific work, namely quantum physics.

○ *Previous research*

No study ever answers all the questions that we want to ask about a particular subject. New research findings nearly always inspire new research questions. Sometimes, it is because these findings are surprising, or because they conflict with existing theory, or other research findings.

Philosopher and sociologist Michel Foucault spent close to 30 years demonstrating that many fundamental ideas about human nature and society, which people usually understand to be unchanging, vary with the course of history. His work contests the influence of thinkers like Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, and challenges our assumptions about a wide range of issues, including prisons, policing, insurance, mental illness, sexuality and welfare.

○ *Practical concerns*

Very often researchers will be confronted by a problem in their own lives or become aware of the problems facing other people in their community. Much research is aimed at solving immediate problems in the world.

The increasing rate of HIV infection in Southern Africa has challenged researchers to develop the most effective strategies for changing human sexual behaviour. In this way, and countless others, social scientists are responding to a practical concern arising in their world.

○ *Personal interest*

Finally, it is often the case that researchers have their own special areas of interest, and that their interest inspires their research topics.

Look in many different places at the same time. Read, talk to people, and look closely at the world around you



It is always a good idea to generate several possible research questions and then choose the best one. After all, you wouldn't walk into a shop and buy the first shirt that you saw. Instead you would look at several shirts, compare them, and purchase the one that suited you best. The same applies to research questions.

Every research question has strengths and weaknesses and the choice of the "best" topic is sometimes a subtle one. The following is a list of criteria which can be used to judge the usefulness of a research question. It is not a complete list so make sure that you add your own criteria in order to be sure that your final choice matches your needs.

- Do you have access to the information needed to answer the question?
- Does your question have suitable theoretical background? (This is particularly important where research is being undertaken for degree purposes).

- How might answering the question advance human understanding of the topic?
- How might this research contribute to research methodologies used in the area?
- How might research on this question find direct or indirect application?
- How interesting is the question to you?
- Do you have the skills (or can you develop them) to find an answer to the question?
- Do you have the necessary time, financial support and equipment to find an answer to the question?
- Does the question meet any criteria laid down by any institutions with which you are working?
- Is the question suitably challenging to meet your study requirements?
- Does the question have the potential to generate further research for yourself and other people in your field?
- Other questions and criteria that relate to your particular discipline, field of study or institution.

Using "Attribute Grids"



Asking so many questions about a range of different possible research questions can produce a confusing jumble of "pros and cons" leaving the inexperienced researcher feeling more lost than when he or she started. Attribute grids are one way of sorting through the confusion.

1. Get a large sheet of paper and divide it into 8 columns (one for each of the questions above) and as many rows as you have possible research questions.
2. Now, write your answer to each question for each possible research question in the blocks that you have drawn. If you like, give each possible research question a score (between 1 and 10) for each question.
3. This system allows you to compare your various possible questions systematically, so you can be sure that you have picked the best question from the list.
4. You might find that none of your possible questions are really suitable, in which case you will have to think up some new ones.

SETTING THE LIMITS ON YOUR RESEARCH



Having decided upon a suitable research problem it is crucial that the researcher define the research question unambiguously. This involves two closely related tasks:

1. The researcher must provide explicit definitions for all concepts used in the research question. This is because language is often not precise as we think it is. It is important that the researcher, everyone involved in the research, and the eventual consumer of the research, understands the question in precisely the same way.
2. The researcher must specify the limits of the study in a way that makes it clear what is, and is not, to be studied. A common mistake is to define the question too broadly (or to set no limits at all) and then find that the resources required for such a large study are not available.

The following example, which moves from the idea for a research question to a research question itself, makes this clearer. Remember that this is just one example of how a research question could be refined - not a model for your own research.

We start with the idea for a research question...

"How have South African mining regulations changed over the years, and what has been the impact of these changes?"

But this is a huge area! We need to determine some appropriate boundaries in order to make the project manageable.

The broad question needs to be restated more precisely so as to indicate both the purpose of the project and the direction that the research will take. Here it is helpful to define the key terms and concepts that must be investigated, and possibly determine a specific period that the study will cover.

We might decide the following:

- To define safety regulations for purposes of this study as "any Act of the South African Parliament which specifically regulates safety on mines within South Africa", so that the project can exclude any regulations imposed by mining companies, mining boards, or particular mine managements.
- To restrict the study to *gold* mining, and to the effect of mining *safety* regulations. After all, there is such a range of different types of mining legislation that this study can't cover them all.

- To restrict the period of time covered by the study. A good starting point would be the Mines and Works Act No.12 of 1911. Why? Because it was the first piece of legislation passed after the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 that controlled general conditions of work on the mines. There could be a number of end-points to the study. One could be the Mine Health and Safety Act No.29 of 1996, which was passed following a Commission of Enquiry into a number of serious accidents in gold and coal mines.

Now we know what type of regulations we are investigating, within which region and sector, and over what time period. Changes in these regulations may have affected many things, however, and we still need to narrow down the areas of impact which the study will consider. Impact on mining safety? Impact on staff morale? Impact on the price of gold? For purposes of this study we might decide the following:

- To look at the impact on *the cost of gold production*.

In other words, the study will not be concerned with regulations in existence prior to 1911, or to the coal, diamond, or other mining industries, or to changes in management structure, worker morale, or any other aspects of the mining industry beyond the impact of legislation on the cost of production.

The research question can now be reformulated as follows:

"How did Acts of Parliament regulating mine safety between 1911 and 1996 impact upon the cost of gold production in South Africa?"

BECOME AN EXPLORER

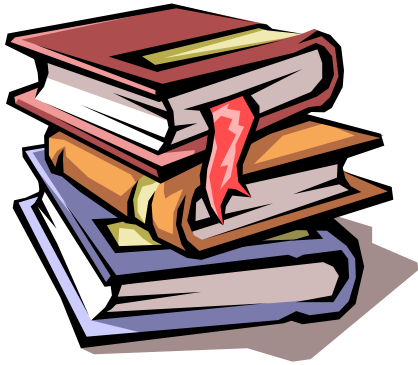


Too often when we find a potentially good research question, we stop our explorations. Actually, an initial research question is only the starting point for deeper and ongoing exploration.

Exploration means finding out as much as possible about the research question. To be a good explorer you need to develop the following skills:

- Literature Search and Reading
- Critical Thinking
- Debate
- Computers and the Internet
- Record Keeping

How well do you rate in each of these areas?
The following pages contain some guidelines to help you develop your skills.



LITERATURE SEARCH & READING

Reading is arguably your highest priority at this stage of the research. Make sure you read broadly and deeply so that you can be sure that you have established the best possible foundation for your research. Find suitable references by:

- Speaking to your advisor/supervisor (if you have one).
- Speaking to other researchers working in the same or related fields.
- Speaking to researchers from other disciplines who can give you interesting perspectives which might not be available within your own discipline.
- Searching the journals that relate to your topic.
- Using subject indexes and abstracts.
- Looking closely at the reference sections of key books and articles relating to your topic.
- Spending time searching library shelves and talking to librarians.
- Searching the Internet for relevant information.

READING PROBLEMS

There is too much to read! I can't keep up!

1. Reading takes time but it is time well spent. Make sure that you create enough time in your week to read.
2. Make sure that your reading time is uninterrupted.
3. Make a list of all the articles and books you think you should read, and note down the bibliographical details. Prioritize your reading so that you start with the most relevant items and gradually get more general.

There are too many ideas! I can't make sense of all of them.

1. Find a general article or book that will provide a "map" of the theoretical landscape. (Try asking more experienced researchers or your supervisor for assistance).
2. Try to fit all your subsequent reading on to this "map".

I don't understand what I am reading.

1. Find an introductory text which introduces the main concepts and theoretical language in your area. (Undergraduate textbooks are often a good place to start but you should discuss this problem with more experienced researchers in your area, or with you supervisor).
2. When reading a text try to "pin down" the concepts or arguments that you do not understand. Make an appointment to discuss the article with a more experienced researcher in your area, or your supervisor.

READING PROBLEMS (cont.)

I forget everything that I read!

1. Make sure that you have a proper "map" of the theoretical territory. As mentioned above, you can find such a map in a general text recommended by a more experienced researcher or our supervisor. If you have a framework into which you can fit new information, you will find it easier to understand and remember.
2. Take clear detailed notes of everything that you read. Always keep your research question in mind to avoid recording pages of information which are not relevant to your work.



"The reading of all good books is like a conversation with the finest men of past centuries."

Rene Decartes (1596 – 1681)

CRITICAL THINKING



It is important that you think long and hard about your research topic and the particular question you plan to investigate. To guide your thinking try to answer the following questions as fully as possible:

- What made me choose this particular topic for my research?
- What assumptions am I making about the research topic?
- How valid are these assumptions?
- Can I think of different ways of thinking about the topic?
- How would people from other disciplines think about this topic?

One way to assist the critical thinking process is to do it with someone else, especially someone who is a more experienced researcher or who has a deeper understanding of your research topic than you do at this early stage.

LOOKING AT PROBLEMS FROM DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW

Looking at problems from different points of view can help to stimulate your thinking about the subject area, and can lead you to valuable resources on your topic.

For the purposes of this example let's look at the question of changing safety regulations on the mines introduced earlier. How might people from different disciplines approach this topic?

Economist: In what ways have changing safety regulations on South Africa's mines influenced mines' long-term financial viability?

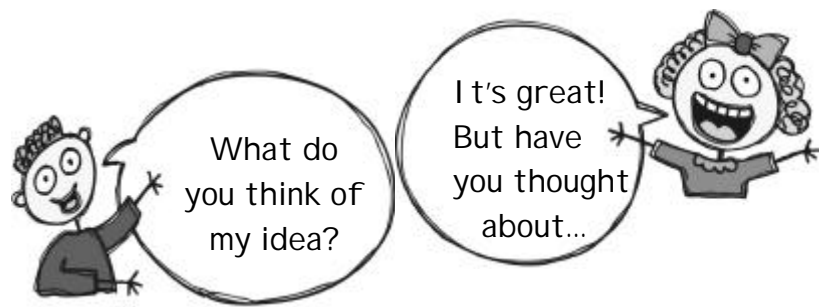
Lawyer: To what extent do changes in the safety regulations on South Africa's mines reflect changing trends in legal procedure in South Africa? How has changing legislation regulating unions influenced safety regulations on South African mines?

Industrial Psychologist: What are the implications of changing safety regulations on South Africa's mines for worker motivation?

Historian: What are the primary factors that result in changes to mining safety regulations in South Africa?

Political Scientist: To what extent have safety regulations on South African mines been influenced by changes in government?

DEBATE



Talking about research projects is an excellent way to develop your thinking. This is particularly true when you are discussing the project with an experienced researcher, or with someone who understands your area of work. However, don't limit your discussions to these people but discuss your proposal with everyone who is interested in you and your work. Even people with very little expertise in your field of work may be able to make helpful suggestions or ask the type of question that will stimulate your own creative processes.

It is very easy to become too attached to one's own ideas, which makes it very difficult to listen to constructive criticism from other people. Listening to what others have to suggest is an important step to putting together a first rate research project. (Remember, that you can always choose not to use other peoples' ideas, but if you don't listen you cannot benefit from their advice).

Advisors and supervisors (if you have one) are particularly important in this regard. Make sure that you spend several hours discussing your research before you begin to write a proposal.

COMPUTERS AND THE INTERNET



In today's world, computers are one of the researcher's most powerful tools. Developing good computer skills will enable you to

- ... do your own word processing, which saves you time and money and means you can produce the quality of work that you desire.
- ... enter and analyse data using a quantitative or qualitative software package.
- ... make effective use of the Internet as a networking tool, source of information and medium for conducting research.

The Internet is changing the way we conduct research and disseminate research findings. For example:

- E-mail and electronic discussion lists facilitate scholarly communication between researchers in different cities and countries. The e-mail alerting services offered by many journals send you tables of contents from journals in your field

- The World Wide Web gives the researcher access to a vast range of resources, some free, others on a commercial basis.

Among the things you will find on the World Wide Web are:

- 📄 Online library catalogues
- 📄 Working papers
- 📄 Journals
- 📄 Bibliographies
- 📄 Contact details for other researchers
- 📄 Newspapers and newspaper archives
- 📄 Databases and research-related information

All researchers should familiarize themselves with the basic tools of the Internet, such as e-mail, electronic discussion lists, browsers and search engines.

A good starting point for South African researchers is the National Research Foundation's Yenza ! Web site:

<http://www.nrf.ac.za/yenza/>

RECORD KEEPING



Another important skill to develop is that of keeping good records. Often you will remember reading something but will not know where you read it. If you have kept a detailed record of your reading, you should be able to track these "lost" references down.

Make reference cards (as in the example below) to keep detailed records of your reading. There are also a number of computer software programmes which allow researchers to automate this process.

Research on: ***AIDS Orphans in Mpumalanga Province***

Author (s): ***Mthembu, J. and Simons, P***

Year of Publication: ***1999***

Title of article/chapter: ***Models of community care for children with HIV***

Title of book or journal: ***SA Journal of Community Health***

Volume Number: ***Vol 18 (3)***

Publisher and City: ***not applicable***

Where available: ***UNISA library***

NOTES: ***Authors review three similar models of community based care. Some interesting points about cultural views of***



You should only begin to write your proposal when you are confident that you can answer "YES" to the following five questions:

1. Have you read broadly and deeply in the area of your research topic? YES NO
2. Have you spent time thinking critically about the research topic? YES NO
3. Have you spent time discussing your research topic with others? YES NO
4. Have you found out how people in other disciplines think about your research topic? YES NO
5. Do you feel ready to begin writing your research proposal? YES NO

Remember, if you start writing too soon, you will be forced to stop and go back to the initial steps.



There is no single format for research proposals. This is because every research project is different. Different disciplines, donor organisations and academic institutions all have different formats and requirements. There are, however, several key components which must be included in every research proposal. The specific research problem will dictate what other sections are required.

The key components are:

- A description of the research problem.
- An argument as to why that problem is important.
- A review of literature relevant to the research problem.
- A description of the proposed research methodology.
- A description of how the research findings will be used and/or disseminated.

DESCRIBING A RESEARCH PROBLEM

Before your proposal can make sense to a reader, he or she must understand clearly what the proposed research will be about. Therefore, you would do well to begin this section with a clear and simple formulation of your research question. Read the following examples:

This research project explores the extent to which vigilantism is growing within different sectors of the South African population. In particular the research focuses on the factors which promote and maintain vigilantism in our society.

Many community projects in rural Mpumalanga rely on micro-enterprises (such as community gardens and spaza shops), to extend the income generating potential of communities. The following is an investigation of the extent to which these micro-enterprises do actually influence the broader economic position of these communities.

Flesh out this section with some or all of the following:

- *Where does this research question come from?* If it arises out of a debate in the literature, introduce that debate. If it started with a request from a particular community, describe that community and the problems confronting it.
- *Clarify or quantify any concepts which may not be clear.*

Have a look at the following very simple example:

This research project explores the extent to which vigilantism is growing within different sectors of the South African population. In particular the research focuses on the factors which promote and maintain vigilantism in our society.

Recent reports in the media detailing the operation of extensive and organized vigilante groups have created public interest and concern, and there are important implications for policing policy.

A "vigilante" is defined as being "a volunteer committee of citizens for the oversight and protection of any interest, especially one organized to suppress and punish crime summarily, as when the process of law appears inadequate."

WHY THE RESEARCH IS IMPORTANT

This section, often referred to as the "rationale" is crucial because it is one place in which the researcher tries to convince other people that the project is worth supporting. Remember that research resources are scarce in South Africa, and that in order to get support, you must be able to show that you plan to make some useful contribution to your discipline or to some aspect of society, either directly or indirectly.

You can do this by describing how the results will be used. Think about how your research ...

- ... may resolve theoretical questions in your area,
- ... may develop better theoretical models in your area,
- ... may influence public policy,
- ... may change the way people do their jobs in a particular field, or,
- ... may change the way people live.

Are there other contributions your research will make? If so, describe them in detail. Look at the following example:

In the economic example of micro-enterprises in rural communities, the researcher might argue that the research will:

- provide an understanding of the economic impact of micro-enterprises
- support the governments' plans for start-up loans to micro-enterprises
- demonstrate the usefulness of micro-enterprises as part of rural development, thereby contributing to the work of government and non-government rural development organisations.

Detail regarding each of these three points should be added to produce a convincing argument as to the usefulness of the research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review presents one of the greatest challenges of the research proposal to experienced and inexperienced researchers alike. The literature review:

- Provides a conceptual framework for the reader so that the research question and methodology can be better understood.
- Demonstrates to the expert reader that the researcher is aware of the breadth and diversity of literature that relates to the research question.

It is important that you are able to provide an *integrated* overview of your field of study. This means that you show awareness of the most important and relevant theories, models, studies, and methodologies. You should indicate how these are relevant to your project, and how these works are similar to and/or different from your own research. The literature review is not simply a list or summary of books and articles that the researcher has read. Instead, it combines the most significant aspects of the works you have consulted, combining and synthesizing them in an integrated description of the field of study.

A good literature review shows how the texts you have mentioned relate to the broad topic, as well as showing the expert reader that you have surveyed much of the appropriate literature. It also demonstrates that a number of different approaches - or ways of understanding - the material will be

used, and, in combination, will help you to produce an original study.

If you are having difficulty with this section, try structuring your work around these questions:

- What are the broad bodies of literature that have relevance for your research topic (local and international)?
- What methods and results have previous researchers in your field produced? What is the history of your area of study?
- What theoretical model, or models, relate to your research topic? Describe these in detail.
- What different methodologies have been used by other researchers in your area? Try to identify the key methodological issues that must be addressed, since these will determine your own choice of methodology.
- What are the most recent research findings in your area of study?
- What gaps and contradictions exist among these findings? What new research questions do these findings suggest?
- What structure suits my literature review best?
- What should I leave out?
- What quotations should I include?

Do not start writing your literature review until you have developed a broad and deep understanding of your topic

Examples: (The research topic is "the History of Mental Illness in Natal in the period up to 1945")

Unsuccessful Literature Review

Foucault's works looked at mental illness, asylums, and the archaeology of knowledge. Roy Porter and Edward Shorter's histories of psychiatry and psychology show that definitions of mental illness have differed across time and place. Ernst and Swartz record that under colonialism science and medicine contributed to racial, class, and sexual discrimination.

Feminist writers Chesler and Showalter who have written on psychiatry will be important for this study. Post-structuralist and post-modernist approaches to the construction and representation of identities will be used. Post-colonialism's concern with the 'subaltern' and the suppression of 'subaltern voices' will be significant.

Successful Literature Review

This study will draw on diverse approaches to the history of psychiatry, and to the origins of segregation in southern Africa. Histories of psychiatry and psychology have shown that, although having a probable partial biochemical basis, the criteria for the definition of mental illness have differed across time and place. The history of science and medicine in both Europe and in the colonial order provide a means for exploring the role of biomedicine (including psychiatry) in contributing to racial, class, and sexual discrimination.

Feminist analyses of the centrality of gender, and critiques of psychiatry and psychology, will be a key axis around which this study is formed. For example, while men of all races formed the majority of inmates at the Natal Government Asylum in nineteenth century Natal, women were deemed to be particularly prone to particular forms of mental illness.

Post-structuralist and post-modernist approaches to the construction and representation of identities, and to the articulation of power, will provide a means of deconstructing the 'texts' and discourses which are an important part of this study. In particular, the works of Michel Foucault on mental illness, asylums, and the archaeology of knowledge will be considered. I recognise, however, that the application of Foucault's ideas in the African context is problematic. Post-colonialism's concern with the 'subaltern' and the suppression of 'subaltern voices' will be reflected in attempts to 'hear the voices' of the institutionalised.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology section of the research proposal is the second component which often causes great difficulty to both experienced and inexperienced researchers. Although many texts try to prescribe a set formula for the methodology section, this can be extremely limiting. This is because there is a very broad (and growing) diversity of methodologies available to the researcher in the social sciences or humanities.

So how do I know what to put into my methodology section?

The methodology section is designed to explain to your reader precisely how you intend to set about finding answers to the research question. You need to put in enough detail so that your reader (who has never met you) will understand precisely what process has led to your results and conclusions.

Three examples of possible methodology structures are included here. The first is for more traditional empirical research methods, the second is for emergent (or exploratory) research designs, and the third is for literature based research. Remember that these are merely examples and that you will need to adapt these structures, or develop a different structure to meet the particular needs of your research.

Empirical Research Methodology

Hypotheses

Specific research hypotheses to be tested during data analysis.

Research Design

Should the researcher plan to use several groups, or repeated testing to test particular hypotheses this should be explained in this section. Most research methodology text books discuss the more commonly used research designs.

Sampling

Empirical research almost always depends upon a sample which is assumed to accurately represent a population. Therefore, the techniques by which the sample was chosen are vital to a discussion the validity of the research findings.

Empirical Research Methodology (cont.)

Measurement instruments

When particular measurement instruments are used it is often important to explain how those instruments were developed, where they have previously been used (if at all), and to what effect.

Data collection procedures

Detailed data collection procedures should also be included so that other researchers can replicate your method exactly if required.

Data analysis

Various techniques of quantitative and qualitative data analysis exist and should be described in detail in this section.

Emergent Research Methodology

Emergent research methodologies are useful when the research topic is a very new one and no established and tested methodologies exist. In these cases the researcher might choose to begin with some exploratory data collection and use this to develop an appropriate research methodology. An appropriate methodology section might have the following structure:

Exploratory Phase:

Details of how an initial set of exploratory data will be gathered and analysed.

Development of Research Methodology:

Description of the process whereby an appropriate methodology will be developed. This may include descriptions of research participants, the criteria that will be employed in developing a method, and how the method will be tested (if at all).

Literature-Based Research

Some studies are not based on empirical work at all but contribute through the systematic and detailed analysis of existing texts. In these cases some of the following sub-heading might be appropriate to a research methodology section:

Sources:

Some description of the body of writing upon which the research will be based is necessary. This may include both primary and secondary sources, and should be clearly defined.

Analysis procedures:

A detailed description of how the various texts will be analysed must be included in order to ensure that another researcher, working from the same set of texts would be able to replicate the method.

Note that the structure of the methodology section depends entirely on the methodology to be used. Attempts to impose an "artificial" structure are likely to result in failure.

The NRF's Annotated Bibliography of Research Methodology textbooks and other materials may help you in identifying resources to help you broaden your understanding of research methodology:

<http://www.nrf.ac.za/methods/reviews.htm>

DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

A key feature of the research proposal, and one this is often neglected, is a discussion of the processes by which the research findings will be disseminated.

Consider the following example:

If research is intended to assist a rural community to find alternative income generating strategies, it is of limited value to publish the research only in a thesis form. It needs to be translated into a set of practical strategies that can be used to make a real difference in the lives of the community.

Thus the way in which results will be disseminated is directly related to the research question and its importance to society. Different audiences use information in different ways, and it is part of the researcher's duty to ensure that results are presented in as useful a manner as possible. Different ways of disseminating research results include research reports, journal articles, books, conference presentations, electronic publishing, newspaper and magazine articles, and public presentations.

FINAL COMMENTS ON STRUCTURE

Make sure that you find a proposal structure that suits the needs of your research. If you are submitting to different organisations, make sure that you find out what those organisations' requirements are. Some institutions have very rigid formats and often proposals are disadvantaged because they do not conform to the requirements laid down.

Apart from the sections outlined above, many organisations demand other sections as well. These sections could include:

- *Budgets*

Make sure that amounts budgeted for are realistic and up to date. Check before submitting what kind of costs are acceptable.

- *Time Frames*

Inexperienced researchers tend to underestimate the amount of time that the various stages of research will take. Be generous when working out time frames and check them with a more experienced researcher.

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT WRITING



Many people assume that any literate person can write a research proposal. This is not automatically true. Writing is a difficult skill to master and one that requires practice and some dedication. Some tips to help you in your writing include:

- Always structure your work in advance.
- Know what you want to say before trying to write it.
- Every sentence must contain one idea only.
- Each sentence must follow logically from the one before. A well written text is a "chain of ideas".
- While writing, keep your reader's needs in mind. This means providing a "verbal map" of your document so that your reader knows what to expect, and placing "verbal signposts" in your text to explain what is coming next.

True ease in writing comes from art, not chance.

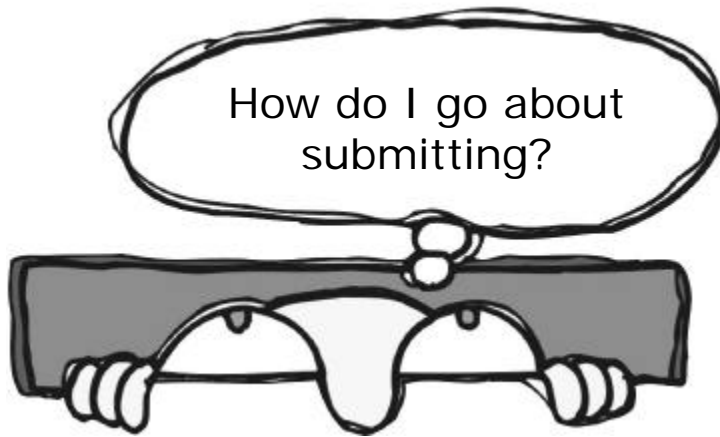
NOTES ON STYLE

Do:

- ... produce a professional looking proposal
- ... be interesting
- ... be informative
- ... write in a way that is easy to read
- ... include a contents page
- ... use clear headings and sub-headings
- ... be concise and precise
- ... use simple language wherever possible
- ... construct clear arguments
- ... check your spelling and grammar
- ... reference your work fully using an acceptable format

DON'T:

- ... use words when you are not absolutely certain of their meaning
- ... use difficult words to impress your reader
- ... use overly simplistic language
- ... repeat yourself
- ... digress



Before submitting make sure you have completed each of the following steps:

1. Proof-read your work carefully.
2. Ask a friend or relative to read your proposal.
3. Ask an experienced researcher or your supervisor to read your proposal.
4. Ensure that you have met all the requirements laid down for research proposals by the organization to which you are submitting it.
5. Submit your proposal with a short covering letter to the correct contact person and address, before the published deadline.

Fatigue and impatience can ruin your proposal. Spend a little more time making sure that your work is perfect before submitting it.

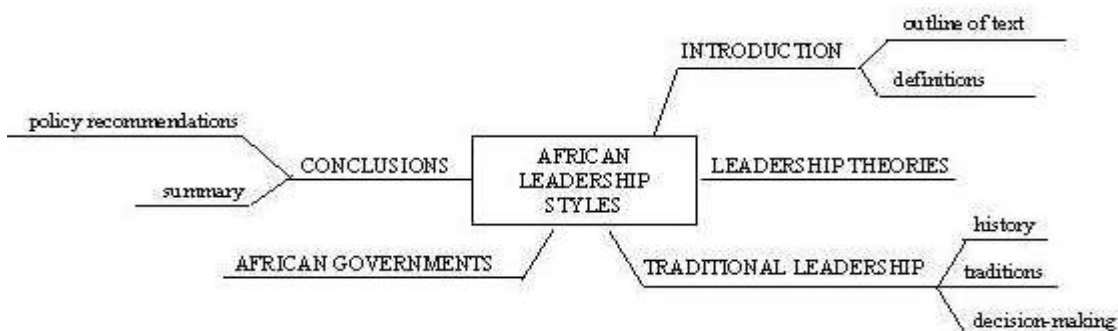


Use "Spider Diagrams" to structure your proposal

A Spider Diagram is a tool for planning your writing. Try the following ...

1. Draw a box in the centre of a large sheet of blank paper. Write the title of your research proposal in that box.
2. Draw a "leg" from the central "body" towards the top right hand corner of the page. Label this "leg" with the first topic that you wish to deal with in your proposal.
3. Add more legs moving clockwise around the page until all the sections have been included, with the final one being somewhere near the top left of the page.
4. Now divide each "leg" up into smaller "legs" with all the points that you wish to make in each section. (Again work clockwise from the top left so that the sequence of ideas is maintained),
5. You may have to redraw your spider diagram several times until you find a structure that works for your proposal.

Look at the following simple example:



COMMON EVALUATION CRITERIA

The evaluation criteria which follow below have been used by the NRF to evaluate research proposals in the social sciences and humanities. Many research funding organizations use similar criteria to evaluate proposals, with the various categories carrying more or less weight depending on the priorities of the organization concerned and the level at which the research is to be carried out.

These evaluation criteria offer a useful tool for applicants who want to have an idea of how their proposals may be assessed. Prospective applicants must bear in mind, however, that these evaluation criteria are generic, and were designed to cover a variety of disciplines, methodologies and research approaches. When constructing research proposals applicants need to understand the nuances and conventions of their own disciplines, and not attempt to force proposals into moulds that are inappropriate.

Applicants should also check whether the funding body to which they are applying makes their evaluation criteria publicly available.

NRF SOCIAL SCIENCES/HUMANITIES RESEARCH GRANT EVALUATION CRITERIA

Category 1. Quality Of The Research Proposal

Problem Identification:

- Is the problem/line of inquiry clearly identified?
- Has appropriate literature been examined in order to provide a background to the problem?
- Have other relevant sources been used to identify the problem?
- Are the aims and/or objectives of the inquiry clearly specified?

Approach:

- To what extent are the conceptual framework and theoretical assumptions clearly stated?
- Are the project design, methods of data collection and analysis appropriate to the aims of the research?

Significance:

- To what extent will the research make an original contribution or be an innovative application of knowledge to its disciplinary field and/or across disciplines?
- Is the proposed research a new line of inquiry?
- Is the proposed research likely to promote further investigation within and/or across disciplines and fields?

Feasibility:

- Do the preliminary data and the available resources support the feasibility of the project?
- Does the researcher's track record or potential, support his/her ability to successfully accomplish the project?

Budget:

- Is the budget justified in relation to the proposed research activities and in terms of NRF's regulations on permissible expenditure?
- Does the project include a plan for research and budget management?

Category 2. Impact Of The Proposed Research**Within the research community:**

- Does the research promote teaching or does it have the potential to do so?
- Does the research project promote research training?
- Does the project include the participation of researchers, junior researchers and postgraduate students from historically disadvantaged institutions, race and gender groups?
- Is the research likely to create networks and partnerships locally, regionally and/or internationally?
- Is the research likely to promote the acquisition of new databases, literature collections, computer software and hardware or to promote the development of existing databases and literature collections?
- Is there a plan to disseminate the research findings within the discipline and across disciplines?

Outside the research community:

- Is there a plan to disseminate the research findings amongst stakeholders and the wider public?
- Does the research project have a potential social impact, i.e. promote problem solving, social policy development or evaluation, etc.?