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Guide to writing a research proposal

Study Development Factsheet

Deciding the topic for your research proposal

Before you write your research proposal, you need to decide what you are actually going to research! Consider the following questions to help you decide what topic you might want to conduct research into:

- What are the main topics you have studied so far in your course?
- What questions have come to your mind while you have been studying?
- Have you had any discussions with your academic tutor about what you might be interested in researching?
- Have you noticed any gaps in research into particular topics?
  Tip: look for suggestions for further research in the conclusion section of research articles that you read!
- Have you found yourself being drawn to a particular area within your field?
- What specific issues within that area are you interested in?
- Why are these issues important and relevant today?
  Tip: try to identify the most up-to-date literature related to your topic!

Resources

- **The Library Catalogue** and **Google Scholar** are good places to start for finding existing academic articles.
- It is also a good idea to look at the **specialist subject resources** related to your subject. You can access these from the library homepage.
- You can book a tutorial with an **Academic Liaison Librarian** to help you find relevant resources and get advice on how to conduct your literature search.
- If you are unsure whether your research topic is appropriate, you can ask the **module lead** for the dissertation or research project. They should be able to give you guidance around this, as well as the structure and content of your proposal.

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Writing the research proposal

Once you have decided on your topic, it's time to start writing your research proposal. You will need to include several sections in your proposal in order to cover all aspects of study. Use the following questions to help you think about what you will include in each section.

(N.B. the particular structure you use for your research proposal will vary depending on your subject and the brief from your school.)

Title

Clear and specific description of the proposed study

Abstract

Brief summary of the study including research question, hypothesis, and methodology

Introduction

What are the main themes?

What gap or problem is the research aiming to address?

How does it relate to existing research in the field?

Aims

What is your specific research question?

Are there primary aims and secondary aims?

What is your hypothesis?

Methodology

Which variables will you use?

Which are the dependent and independent variables?

Which external factors do you need to consider?

What is your sample size and how will you select them?

Will you use qualitative or quantitative data (or both)?

What is the timeline for your research?

Where will the study take place?

How will you measure/record your data?

How will you analyse your data? What tools/software will you use?

How will you ensure quality and consistency during your study?

What limitations do you anticipate?

Do you need a budget? What will you need to pay for in order to complete the research?

Ethics

How will you ensure you protect the rights of your participants?

How will you ensure you capture and store information in a legal and ethical way?

Further reading

- Booth, Wayne C. et al. (2008), *The craft of research*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Hart, Chris (1998), *Doing a literature review: releasing the social science research imagination*. London: SAGE.

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