

Research Proposal

What Is It?

Researchers write proposals to announce their intentions about undertaking a study and to seek funding or approval (e.g., from Institutional Review Board). For graduate students preparing to write a thesis or dissertation, a research proposal is an opportunity to explore a topic, to understand a problem they would like to investigate, and to convince a thesis or dissertation committee that their research is worth doing. In this handout, we offer an overview of how to begin developing a research proposal.

A typical thesis or dissertation proposal includes these sections:

- ✓ Introduction
- ✓ Statement of the Problem
- ✓ Literature Review
- ✓ Purpose of the Study and Research Questions
- ✓ Significance of the Study
- ✓ Overview of the Methodology

How to Begin

Respond to these questions in writing:

1. WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

What do you want to know and why? Consider what you *wonder* about. Describe what is important to you, an issue which you have a *personal/professional stake*, an event or situation you are *interested* in and *curious* about and want to explore. What do you hope to discover by conducting your study?

2. WHY IS IT A PROBLEM?

How did your interest develop (use a snapshot/anecdote)? What have you seen or heard? When and where? What is your relationship to the issue? Why do you care (What are you valuing?)

Describe why this issue is important, not why it can be done but why it should or must be done. Consider how it relates to the larger societal or professional context (reason for and significance of problem). Convince the reader that it is worth investing time, effort, etc.

3. WHO HAS DONE WHAT ABOUT RESEARCH ON THIS PROBLEM?

Consider who in or outside your field might be interested in this issue? Who else looked at this issue?

What research in the area have you been reading? Describe each article/book. Explain their relevance to the problem. What do you find interesting? What similarities, differences, or contradictions do you notice? What are you **not** finding in the literature? Who might have been left out of the discussion? What other perspectives might be involved?

4. HOW?

How will you go about investigating it? How will you tell if you've found it? Which method might best help you answer your research question (you might need to review literature on the methodology to determine that)?

Will you need to conduct interviews, do observations, or survey a segment of the population? (Note: Determine if you need IRB approval.) How will you recruit participants? What resources will you need?

How will you analyze the collected data?

What to Do Next

1. Check with your department and advisor what is expected in a proposal. Does your department have a proposal template?
2. Find a model proposal you can refer to as you write your own (ask your advisor).
3. Get feedback often and from different audiences (your family, friends, professors, colleagues, advisor, other graduate students, and the Richard Wright Center). The more you talk about your research, the more comfortable you get.
4. Keep a positive attitude. Research is hard. If it was easy, everybody would be doing it.
5. Participate in the RWC roundtables and share your ideas and experience.

Repeat the steps, not necessarily in this order. ☺