

COMPONENTS OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL: Suggested Guidelines and headings

(Source: Brynard & Hanekom (1997): Introduction to research in Public Administration and related academic disciplines; J L van Schaik Academic Publishers, Pretoria, pages 24- 26)

Research encompasses various components which need to be explained or described in a research proposal. A common academic language allows research proposals from any field to be understood by the research community. The term "research proposal" indicates that a specific course of action will be followed. The following components can be regarded as steps in the writing of the research proposal. They are important and should be followed for the actual composition of the proposal:

1. **Title page** of the research proposal: A research proposal should be submitted with a title page on which full particulars pertaining to the following appear. Please go to the BSU School of Graduate Studies' website at http://www.bemidjistate.edu/academics/graduate_studies/ and choose the Front Matter Templates.
2. **Introduction:** Emphasize the importance of the proposed research and describe the research topic or theme. This is usually done in one or two paragraphs. In all cases it should be stated whether a relationship exists between the proposed research and research undertaken before. If no such research has been undertaken previously, this should be pointed out. This sets the context of the research.
3. **Motivation (the "so what?" question):** Present, as clearly as possible, the source of interest in the topic or theme. Also state why the topic justifies the research and indicate what is proposed with the research. For example, the topic was selected because of practical problems experienced in the particular field. **This is often part of the introduction or context-setting paragraphs.**
4. **Preliminary review of relevant literature:** Indicate that a review of literature has been started (and is underway) that helps the researcher to distinguish the research problem clearly. Explain that relevant publications (books, legislation, documents, files, etc.) have been or will be reviewed to provide both broad and more focused relevance to the proposed research. However, bear in mind that the actual research will often require more than a survey of relevant literature. Therefore, it is necessary also to indicate the other sources from which data will be obtained.
5. **Problem description/statement:** Give a clear and concise description of the research problem, purpose, or question. The researcher should denote exactly what he or she intends to do and what he or she wants to achieve with the research. This description will later serve as the point of departure for the wording of the title of the research paper, dissertation or thesis, as well as provide the focus of the final discussion chapter.
6. **Research methodology** (This is also referred to as the strategy for research.): Briefly but clearly indicate the methods of data collection either within a quantitative or qualitative methodology; as well as the techniques for data collection, e.g. questionnaires, and measurement (the validation of the techniques). Indicate whether field workers will be used to collect data and whether computer programs will be employed to analyze the data. The researcher should also indicate in this section of the proposal which strategies will be followed during the research (i.e. the actions and their sequence) .For example, a questionnaire will be

constructed first, then the data will be analyzed, followed by the writing of the relevant chapter. Motivate the particular actions and their sequence, and give target dates for their completion. Identify the target population (universe), i.e. the respondents and the sample sizes. Please note that if you use human subjects to gather data, you need to complete and submit the Human Subjects Approval Form that is located on the BSU School of Graduate Studies website at, http://www.bemidjistate.edu/academics/graduate_studies/

Your advisor/department may also want you to consider:

7. **IF APPROPRIATE, formulation of a hypothesis:** Formulate a hypothesis which will form part of the research proposal. Indicate whether the hypothesis is inductive or deductive. Also indicate which variables apply.
8. **Clarification of concepts and terms:** Define key concepts and terms to clear up ambiguities and obscurities. The concepts clarified for the research proposal will eventually form part of the list of terms clarified for the research report.
9. **Framework:** The research proposal should include a preliminary framework of the chapters of the research report. Also give a brief indication (one or two sentences or a short paragraph) of the proposed contents of each chapter, as well as the target dates for the completion of the respective chapters.
10. **Sources:** Include a short list of sources. For example, list those sources which were consulted during the literature survey to distinguish the research problem.

Once accepted, the research proposal will serve as a guideline to the researcher. It will enable him or her to collect relevant data only and not waste time and effort on sidetracks. (Sidetracks could be interesting to explore, but they do not contribute to solving the research problem at hand.) Please check with your advisor/department for other specific directions and requirements for your proposal.