A. Introduction

A research proposal is commonly written by scholars seeking grant funding for a research project when enrolling for a research-based postgraduate degree. Graduate and post-graduate students also embark on a university dissertation to obtain a degree or get that PhD. Although it is just a course assignment, a student must treat the introduction as the decisive initial pitch for a research inquiry or in-depth investigation of the significance of an issue for study.

After reading the introduction, your readers should be able to clearly understand what you want to do. Likewise, they should be able to appreciate your enthusiasm for the topic and be engaged in the potential results of the study (Jackowski & Leggett, 2015).

Consider your introduction as a two-four-paragraph narrative that concisely responds to the following questions:

- What is the central problem of the study?
- What field of study is relevant to that core problem?
- What methods should be utilized to analyze that problem?
- Why is this study important?
- What is its significance to the academe and the world?
- Why should someone reading the proposal be concerned about the results of the proposed research?

Take note that most academic institutions and funding agencies do not require an abstract or synopsis before the introduction. However, it is best to check your institution's guidelines.

B. Background and Significance

This part explains the context of a research proposal and clearly describes its importance. While some writers integrate this part in the introduction, a number of scholars prefer to write it separately to allow for a smooth flow of a proposal's narrative.

A good way to approach this section is by assuming that your readers are busy but want to know the gist of your research problem and the entire study (Kivunja, 2016). Remember that this is not an extensive essay that covers everything about your proposed study, but rather a concise text that is enough to elicit interest in your research.

With these in mind and although there is no definitive rule for framing a proposed study's significance, you should endeavour to address the following key considerations:

- Specify the problem of the study and provide a more detailed elaboration of the research purpose. This is very important when the research problem is multifaceted or complex.
- State the rationale of your research proposal and explain, in an engaging way, why it is worthwhile to conduct.
- Present the core problems or issues that will be addressed. This can be made either in questions or statements.
- Underscore how your research can build upon existing assumptions about the proposed study's problem.
- Elaborate on the details of your methodology to conduct your study, including the key sources, analytical approach, etc.
- Clearly establish the limits of your proposed study to provide a clear research focus.
- Provide definitions of key terms or concepts, if necessary.

C. Review of Prior Studies and Literature

Your study background and significance are directly related to this section, which primarily offers a more deliberate review and synthesis of existing studies pertinent to your proposed research problem. This part aims to properly situate your proposed study within the bigger scheme of things of what is being investigated, while, at the same time, showing the innovation and originality of your proposed work (Abdulai & Owusu-Ansah, 2014).

Because a literature review often involves heavy information, it is important that this section is smartly structured to allow a reader to comprehend the major contentions that underlie your proposed research vis-a-vis those of other scholars. An effective way to do this is to separate the literature into major themes or conceptual strategies. This is a better approach instead of chronologically or methodically describing sets of studies one by one.

As there are many efficient ways in framing your review of existing related studies, many scholars are following the use of the "five Cs" in writing a literature review (Sudheesh et al., 2016):

- **Cite** properly in order to maintain the primary focus on the previous studies related to the research problem. If you are not familiar with citation formats, you can check out our guide on how to cite a research paper.

- **Compare** the methods, outcomes, models, and arguments mentioned in the literature. Identify the various agreements among the authors.
- **Contrast** the different themes, controversies, methodologies, and arguments underscored in the literature. Explain the main areas where these authors disagree and debate.
- **Critique** the literature. Identify the engaging arguments used by scholars. Determine the methodologies that appear most valid, suitable, and reliable.
- **Connect** the literature to your own particular study area and topic. Discuss whether and how your proposed study draws upon, deviates from, synthesizes, or contributes new knowledge to existing literature.

D. Aims and Research Questions

Once you've determined a good angle for your study, it is time to compose your research objectives. Ask yourself: What do you want your readers to know when they read your proposal? Give considerable time to properly framing your objectives and try to write them in a single sentence, if possible. Familiarize yourself with what is a research question if you are having difficulties in this area.

A research objective will help you stay focused and prevent you from drifting off on tangents (Krathwohl & Smith, 2005). Regardless of the specific topic or problem or method you choose, all study proposals must deal with the following questions:

- **What do you plan to achieve?** Be straightforward and concise in describing the research problem and what topic you are proposing to study.
- **Why do you want to conduct the research?** You must also provide compelling evidence that your selected topic is worthy of a thorough examination.
- **How are you going to conduct the research?** Make sure that your proposed study is doable and provide a clear, coherent set of strategies to complete it.

For some institutions, this section can be included as part of the Introduction, usually placed as the last paragraph of that section.

E. Research Design & Methods

This part should be written properly and organized logically since you are not yet conducting the actual research. However, it must build confidence among your readers that it is something worth pursuing.

The underlying purpose here is to convince the reader that your research design and suggested analytical strategies will properly address the problem/s of the study. It also aims to assure the reader that the selected methods offer the means to efficiently interpret the likely study outcomes. Simply put, your research design and methods should be directly connected to the particular objectives of your research (Lyman & Keyes, 2019).

An effective way to frame your study design is by drawing good examples from your literature review. Emulate the good approaches used by other researchers. Be particular about the methodological techniques you intend to use to gather data, the strategies you will utilize to analyze your data, and the external validity measures you will employ.

Make sure to cover the following when describing the methods, you will utilize:

- Establish the research process you will engage in, including the method you will use for interpreting the outcomes with regard to the problem of the study.
- Do not simply discuss what you plan to accomplish from using the methods you will select, but also describe how you will use the time while utilizing these techniques.
- Note that the methods section is not merely a collection of activities. Since you have selected the approaches, you should also use it to argue why it is the best approach to examine the study problem. Explain this clearly.
- Finally, foresee and acknowledge any possible obstacles and drawbacks when you undertake your research design and provide a plan of action to solve them.

Remember, there is no such thing as a perfect method for any type of research endeavour. However, if you rigorously follow the best practices employed by those who conducted relevant studies and provide the corresponding rationales why you selected them, then you can readily address any critique that might come your way.

F. Implications and Contribution to Knowledge

This section is where you contend how you think your proposed study will enhance, change, or expand current knowledge in the research topic that will be investigated. By drawing from your research objectives, explain how the expected outcomes will affect future studies, practice, theory, policymaking, procedures, etc. Discussing study implications typically have either methodological, theoretical, or substantive significance (Abdulai & Owusu-Ansah, 2014).

You can use these guide questions when framing the potential ramifications of your proposed research:

- What could the outcomes signify when it comes to disputing the underlying assumptions and theoretical framework that support the research?
- What recommendations for further studies could emerge from the expected study results?
- How will the outcomes affect practitioners in the real-world context of their workplace?
- Will the study results impact forms of interventions, methods, and/or programs?
- How could the outcomes contribute to solving economic, social, or other types of issues?
- Will the outcomes affect policy decisions?
- How will people benefit from your proposed research?
- What specific aspects of life will be changed or enhanced as an outcome of the suggested study?
- How will the research outcomes be implemented and what transformative insights or innovations could emerge when they are implemented?

The purpose of this section is to reflect upon gaps or understudied topics of the existing literature and explain how your proposed research contributes to a new understanding of the research problem should the study be conducted as proposed.

G. Compliance with Ethical Principles

There is nothing fundamentally best or worst when it comes to the scientific writing style. It is just a standardized approach for presenting information that is tailored to facilitate communication. Different scholarly disciplines have diverse publication styles. So, this section depends on the protocols set by the target institution or agency.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that fundamental ethical principles guide all scholarly research and writing. If you are observing APA conventions, ethical guidelines are meant to accomplish three objectives, namely, “to protect intellectual property rights, to protect the rights and welfare of research participants, and to ensure the accuracy of scientific knowledge” (APA, 2014, pp. 11).

Every social and behavioral sciences writer (and other scholars who adhere to these principles) advocates these objectives and observes the long-standing standards that their professional groups follow (APA, 2014).

Another major ethical APA principle promotes the need to ensure the accuracy of scientific knowledge. The underlying principle behind the (universal) scientific method comprises observation, which can be verified and repeated by other scholars. Accordingly, scholars are expected to not engage in research writing that involves falsifying or fabricating data. Moreover, researchers should not modify study outcomes just to uphold a hypothesis or to remove problematic data in order to present a more credible report (APA, 2014).

H. Budget

Some universities do not require a detailed budgetary allocation for proposed studies that only involve archival research and simple academic research, although some still do. However, if you are applying for research funding, you will likely be instructed to also include a detailed budget that shows how much every major part of the project will cost.

Be sure to verify what type of costs the funding agency or institution will agree to cover, and only include relevant items in your budget. For every item, include:

- **The actual cost** – present how much money do you need to complete the entire study
- **Justification** – discuss why such budget item is necessary to complete the research
- **Source** – explain how the amount was calculated

Conducting a research project is not the same as buying ingredients when cooking meals. So how do you make a budget when most entries do not have a price tag? To prepare a correct budget, think about:

- **Materials** – Will you need access to any software solutions? Does using a technology tool require installation or training costs?
- **Time** – How much will you need to cover the time spent on your research study? Do you need to take an official leave from your regular work?
- **Travel costs** – Will you need to go to particular places to conduct interviews or gather data? How much must you spend on such trips?
- **Assistance** – Will you hire research assistants for your proposed study? What will they do and how much will you pay them? Will you outsource any other activities (statistical analyses, etc.)?

I. Timetable

The research schedule is another aspect where one should be realistic and to the point. The study turnaround time shows that your proposed study can be

finished within the allowed period of completion, e.g., the student's candidature or the university's academic calendar.

The timeline must comprise a series of objectives that should be met to complete all the aspects of your academic research requirements (thesis, dissertation, or other degree requisites), from preliminary research to the final editing. Every step must include an expected completion date.

It should likewise contain a statement of the progress that one has made so far. Other relevant research-related activities should also be included, such as paper presentations (if applicable). Finally, it must be noted that the timeline is not a fixed document—a researcher must update it regularly, when necessary.

J. Conclusion

One of the best ways to conclude your research proposal is by presenting a few of your anticipated outcomes. Upon reaching this final stage, you must disclose the conclusions and arguments that you expect to reach. Your reader will know that these are anticipated results based on how much you've researched so far and that these expectations will likely change once the complete study has been made.

It is important, nonetheless, that you give your reader a sense of what conclusions may be drawn. This will allow your reader to further assess the significance and validity of your project. It will also indicate to your reader that you have thought ahead and considered the potential outcomes and implications of your research. Writing a research proposal example should allow you to determine if you are communicating all essential information in your conclusion.

K. Appendices

Some funding agencies and academic institutions require proponents of research proposals to include an Appendix section. This contains supplemental material that is not a core element of a proposal's main narrative but is considered valuable in enhancing the views and arguments raised in the proposal. It may include forms and data like tables, informed consent, clinical/research protocols, data collection instruments, etc.

This supplementary section is also the best part to include one's latest curriculum vitae if required. You can include all relevant academic and professional experience to present your case as a qualified individual to conduct your proposed research. It will help significantly to present pertinent research

works you've completed, especially if you have published research reports, articles, etc.

It should be noted that many students and budding researchers who went through the rigours of research actually found the experience so worthwhile that they made it a long-term career. In fact, research as a professional job is one of the better-paying jobs worldwide. According to Glassdoor (2020), the average base pay for professional researchers in the U.S. is $54,411 per year. Among OECD-member countries, Denmark tops the list with an average of 15.65 people employed as professional researchers or scientists for every 1,000 employees in 2018.