

Research Proposal Part 1

The first draft of the proposal should address these following questions:

1. **“What”** is the research topic of the project you are proposing to study: State your research question or research problem clearly.
2. **“Why”** is this a worthwhile research question for investigation: for example, why is it an important problem; what is the puzzle, what is the gap in the literature, etc. This section also includes a brief, focused literature review.
3. **Briefly outline the “how”** – How are you proposing to study your research problem? What methods do you suggest would be the most useful and why? You can be brief here, just some ideas, since you will be working on this part more in-depth over the next weeks.

This first draft of the proposal should be around 5-7 pages, 12 pt, Times Roman, double spaced 1 inch margins, and carefully, clearly written.

Clarity as well as organization is important! Please edit your work before submitting it to me. (Make sure to spell check ☺!)

Suggested Structure

I. Introduction (2 pages)

1. What is the topic of your research?
2. What area of sociology is concerned with questions related to your research interest?
3. Formulate your research question(s) or the problem you want to address as clearly as possible. What is research goal, for example descriptive, exploratory, explanatory, evaluation?
4. Explain how you came to this question/problem based on your previous interests (research you might have been involved in, other courses you have taken, your work experience, discussions, etc.).
5. Explain the assumptions you are making in researching your question.
Explain the concepts you are using; what indicators/variables will you need to measure these?
What is your hypothesis and your independent/ dependent variables? Or what are you trying to explain?
6. Tentative thesis (argument) (your best answer to the research question based on your work to date)
7. Significance of this research question: Explain why this research is worth pursuing. Why is answering this research question important?

II. Literature Review (3-4 pages)

- Show how your question is embedded in the existing social science research. This is an important way to establish the significance and/or the rationale for your question.
- What is the relevant research literature(s) that address your question and that forms the foundation for your project?
- Make sure to come up with **thematic** structure for discussion the existing literature.

“State of Debate”

- Identify the various positions you have discovered on your question (i.e., how do scholars seem to be discussing your question and what answers have they found).
- Identify the evidence that leads you to your current position or thesis .
- Identify the evidence that leads you to reject other positions or theses .

In addition, in order for me to give you useful feedback:

- Explain briefly what searches you have conducted and what strategies you have used to find the literature .
- Summarize where you found the most relevant sources (in which databases, journals etc.).

III. Methods (1/2 page)

- Describe briefly “HOW” you are going to do your empirical research. Identify research designs that might be useful to pursue your research question: e.g., surveys, observations, interviews, focus groups,

experiments, secondary data analysis etc. What available data sources now exist? Carefully consider what kind of data other researchers in this area have used. Would these be available to you?

IV. Expected Findings

- What do you expect to find?
- How will your search findings contribute to your understanding of the issues surrounding your research question?

V. Conclusion

- Describe how your completed project will contribute to an understanding of the social phenomenon, social processes, event, and/or social behaviors, etc. that you are investigating.

IV. Working Bibliography

- Include your working bibliography. You should have a minimum of 15 articles and 3-5 books. Some of these need to be in mainstream sociology journals – see article critiques.

Here are **some suggestions on how to proceed that may help you** organize your ideas:

Literature Review:

- What would you want to know about this issue and why?
- What kind of background information would be useful to you?
- Where would you look for the background information and for more specialized information?

Do searches in at least two of the following databases: J-Stor, Sociological Abstracts, Social Science Abstracts, Expanded Academic, Genderwatch, Ethnicwatch, etc. see library tour handout.

- Write down your search terms.
- Identify around 10-15 articles that are most important to your question/problem.
- Scan the results of your searches: What are the issues or questions being addressed?
- What research has been conducted? Remember you are looking for survey, field research' and/or comparative/historical methods for your next assignments.
- What types of evidence are the authors using to support their arguments?
(If the full text is unavailable, can you tell from the abstract?)

Begin your research with the materials you already have. Find one or two of the most recent and most closely related articles on your topic. Look through the footnotes and bibliographies that identify the writers' sources. Examine these carefully and provide a list of at least five sources relevant to your question. Be flexible in identifying "relevance." You might need to look at something that discusses a similar or analogous issue or that looks at your question but in a different setting or time period. Do not expect to find an article that precisely answers your question.

Use all of the assistance available to you (i.e., reference desk librarians, your classmates, and Kathrina).

Schutt Book:

In each chapter Schutt is providing some useful advice of how to work on your research proposal.

Some useful WWW pages:

Joya Misra <http://www-unix.oit.umass.edu/~misra/proposal.htm>

Examples for Guidelines of Funding Agencies:

See collection on <http://www.pitt.edu/~offres/proposal/propwriting/websites.html>

As a good example:

* Social Science Research Council: <http://www.ssrc.org/publications/> find the www page "The Art of Writing Proposals" <http://www.ssrc.org/publications/pagemaker.cgi?997974506>