



## DALLAS BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

### How to Write a Proposal

When social scientists desire to conduct an experiment, they first develop a proposal. A proposal introduces the problem, purpose, and significance of a study as well as the experimenter's research question and hypothesis. It also gives a brief explanation of the theory guiding the study, a review of relevant literature pertaining to the theory, and the procedure for the experiment. The proposal should be written in American Psychological Association (APA) format and should include the following subheadings in this order:

#### Introduction

The Introduction explains several essential components of the experiment in detail. After reading the Introduction, the reader will understand why the experimenter is conducting the study and how this research will affect the academic community and society at large.

##### What to include in this section

The following items may appear in an introductory paragraph, or in the case of a thesis or dissertation, they can be separate subheadings altogether:

- Statement of the Problem:  
Answer the following questions in this section:
  1. Why does this research study need to be conducted?
  2. What issues does this study raise that have not been observed in other studies?
- Purpose of the Study:
  1. Include a sentence saying "The purpose of this study is..." under this section.
  2. Identify the unit of analysis or specific inquiry used (self-report survey, observational study, etc.).
- Research Question(s) and Hypothesis:
  1. List all the research questions in the study.
  2. State the researcher's hypothesis for the study.
- Definition of Terms:
  1. Define the central concepts/variables that will be used in the study, citing other research studies as much as needed.

#### Theoretical Framework

The proposal must be guided by a particular theory. From this theory, the researcher is able to understand the rest of the proposal.

##### What to do in this section

- Briefly explain the theory's major tenants as well as how the theory relates to the study.

#### Literature Review or Empirical Review

The Literature Review provides a background for the research problem and illustrates to the reader that the researcher is knowledgeable about the scope of the theory. Investigate as many studies pertaining to the theory as possible, and summarize them in a succinct manner.

### What to do in this section

- Briefly share the results of studies that are related to the proposal.
- Relate the study to an ongoing literary dialog pertaining to the research topic.
- Report the studies sequentially if possible, building upon the findings of prior studies.
- Group the themes of studies together under separate subheadings. For example: "Self-Verification and Stereotypes" and "Self-Verification and Depressed Persons."

## Methodology

The "Methodology" section is the most important section in the entire proposal, as it explains each step the experimenter will take in order to conduct his or her research. This section discusses what measures the researcher will take in order to test the study's hypothesis. Include the following subheadings while expanding on them in as much detail as possible.

### What to include in this section

- Research Design:
  1. State the proposed study's research design (e.g. survey, observation, secondary data of analysis), and explain how this design will derive results.
  2. Briefly describe how the data will be administered and collected, including how subjects will participate in the study.
  3. State which theoretical model will guide this study and what the model predicts will be the results of the study.
- Sampling:
  1. Identify the population under consideration, the sampling method to be used, and elements that will be characteristic of the sample (sex, age, etc.).
- Instrumentation:
  1. Outline the instruments that will be used in the study (e.g. questionnaires, interviews, observation grids), discussing each instrument separately.
  2. Explain why the instruments are considered valid and/or reliable as well as how they will be useful for the proposed study.
  3. Discuss how the instrument will measure the study's independent and dependent variables.
- Data Collection and Analysis Procedures:
  1. Explain the general plan for how the data will be collected, especially how the letter of consent will be administered and collected.
  2. Include any survey, interview, or observation procedures, and identify any incentives for students participating in the study.
  3. Include what statistics or analytical tools will be used for analyzing the data.
- Protection of Human Rights:
  1. Address what efforts will be taken to protect human subjects.
  2. Reiterate that subjects' participation is voluntary and that they can choose to withdraw from the study at any time.
  3. Describe how the subjects' confidentiality will be protected and how they may receive a copy of the study when it is finished.

## Discussion

This section is often labeled "Significance of the Study." In formal proposals for graduate study, the Discussion may be placed near the end of the Introduction. The Discussion focuses on the implications of the proposed study. Therefore, focus on how the study's results will benefit others.

### What to do in this section

- Identify any weaknesses to the proposed study and why they were not addressed.
- Address how well the study will do in terms of internal and external validity.
- Discuss the implications of the study affecting practice, policy, theory, counseling, and/or scholarly/future research.

When the proposal is finished, be sure to include an abstract that summarizes the proposal in 150 to 250 words at the beginning of the proposal. Moreover, include a reference list for all sources at the end of the proposal. See the APA Manual for formatting "Abstract" and "References" pages.

\*Pajares, F. (2007). Elements of a proposal. *Emory University*. Retrieved from <http://www.des.emory.edu/mfp/proposal.html>

\*\*Thanks to Dr. Toby Buchanan for his advice and input in making this handout.