

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

INSTITUTE OF ANTHROPOLOGY, GENDER AND AFRICAN STUDIES

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING MA/PhD RESEARCH PROPOSALS

PRELIMINARIES

Once a research problem is identified, the information is used to write a **research proposal**. A proposal is a document that describes in detail the research problem and topic. It informs the reader about “what is the problem, who has the problem, where it is, and how it will be solved”, using an identified research design, research methods and tools. In addition, it assists the researcher to define essential concepts, activities, subjects, community, area, and procedures. These definitions consist of explanations of all research operations and terms, known as **operational definitions**.

I. Title Page

This is the first page of your proposal. However, it should not be paginated. It should contain the following:

- Title of the report – towards the top of the page.
- Name of the author – middle of the page
- The award you are studying for
- Year- below the above words

NB: All the text on this page should be in capitals.

II. Table of Contents

This comes after the title page. Start pagination here (in Roman numerals). Numerize the sub-headings with the numbers of the chapters, e.g. 1.1 for the first sub-heading in Chapter One. Sub-sub-headings should similarly be numerized, e.g. 2.2.1 for the first sub-sub-heading in Chapter Two.

III. List of tables

If you have any tables in the text, identify them using numerals of their chapters and titles, e.g. Table 4.1 for the first table in Chapter Four. The title of the table should be separated from its number using the colon. Put the identity of the table at the top of the table. Paginate using a continuation of Roman numerals from the Table of Contents.

IV. List of maps

If there are any maps, identify them as in III above. However, put the identity of each below the map. Continue pagination as in III above.

V. List of figures

If there any figures, identify them as in III above and place the identity of each as in 4 above. Continue with pagination using Roman numerals.

ELEMENTS OF A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

1.0 Background to the Study

1.1 Introduction

The introduction contains reasons leading to the research study. Its purpose is to introduce the nature of the research problem, and to show how the problem was identified so that other researchers agree or disagree with our choice.

This section is brief and contains the most current information about the problem. The researcher explains what is to be investigated, why and the method to be used. Previous works are used to prove that there is indeed a problem worth researching.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This refers to what the research has identified as existing in literature, theory or practice – a condition which needs to be probed and solutions found. It may arise from issues, difficulties, current practices or problems that need to be solved or better understood, or it may arise from deductions from existing theories related to the current social and political issues, practical situations or personal experiences. It can be described as the **what** of the study. It may be an issue that a researcher wants to describe, event that he/she has observed and will attempt to explain or a problem he/she will try to develop a solution for. Or it may be a state of affairs that need to be changed, anything that is not working as well as it ought to be, or difficulties to be eliminated.

A research problem must be fully defined. This entails analyzing the problem in occurrence, intensity, distribution and other measures for which data are available. From the research problem, the researcher should generate **research questions**.

The research questions guide the researcher in defining the research objectives. Each research question should be addressed by a specific objective.

1.3 Research Objectives

An objective is an **expected outcome** of an activity. It provides an answer to the question, “**What do we want to find out and why**”? Objectives are, therefore, **statements of expected results, achievements or outcomes of the study**. A good objective should be **SMART** (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound). There are two types of objectives: general and specific.

1.3.1 General Objectives

These are derived from the **purpose** of the study. They make the purpose of the problem clear. The purpose of the study refers to the **general intention** of the study. It serves to elaborate on the information implied in the title of the study by presenting a quick overview of the study itself. In phrasing general objectives, use non-action verbs such as **to examine, to explore, to assess, to understand, to explain, and to study**.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

These are derived from the general objective. They answer questions raised so as to solve a research problem. Specific objectives are, therefore, statements of intended specific outcomes of the study and specify more directly what the researcher is going to do.

In phrasing specific objectives, you should use **action verbs** that are specific enough to be evaluated. Examples of such verbs are: **to determine, to compare, to verify, to calculate, to describe, and to establish**.

1.4 Justification of the Study

This is also known as the **rationale of the study**. It refers to the relevance of the study in terms of academic contributions and practical use that might be made of the findings. It is always stated as a suggestion or intended expectation from the study. It is a rationale for the importance of the study. It particularly highlights the contributions of the research to other researchers, practitioners and policy makers and implementers. It is best considered in terms of usage, benefits or advantages that might be derived from the study findings, conclusions and recommendations. It can be described as the why of the study.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

Scope is also referred to as the **delimitations** of the study. It is a description of the boundary of the research in terms of content, sample size, and geographical and theoretical coverage.

Limitations refer to hindrances or anticipated constraints or potential weaknesses of the study imposed by the methodology of the research. It considers the weaknesses or shortcomings of the research methodology and potential sources of bias. Limitations are, therefore, **internal factors** imposed by the researcher on the study, which are likely to lower the **validity** and **reliability** of the study. They are methodological weaknesses in the study design that may lower its validity and reliability.

2.0 Literature Review

The literature review involves systematic identification, location and analysis of the documents containing information that are related to the planned research. Its purpose is to help the researcher develop a thorough understanding and insight into previous works and trends that have been recorded on the research problem.

A good literature review should:

- ◆ Identify and recognize what has already been done that relates to the research problem. This helps the researcher to avoid unintended duplication and provides the understanding that is necessary for the development of a logical framework in which to fit the chosen problem.
- ◆ Identify and recognize those who have already worked on the problem.
- ◆ Analyze the existing literature on the subject with the objectives of revealing contributions, weaknesses and gaps. It should aim to fill the gaps as a way of contribution.
- ◆ Be according to themes of the study and should reflect the research questions, objectives and hypotheses of the study. Each research objective should be discussed under an appropriate sub-heading.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

A theory is a generalization/proposition that has explanatory power. Social theories explain social phenomena. You are expected to choose a theory that is relevant to your topic and one that explains the relationships between variables.

2.2 Hypotheses/Assumptions

Formulate a set of hypotheses/assumptions in line with your research questions. The hypotheses/assumptions guide the study and are tested during the field study through empirical observations.

2.3 Definition of terms

Provide the conceptual and operational definitions of variables and terms used in the study. Such definitions usually specify what the terms mean in the study and how the variables will be measured through indicators.

3.0 Methodology

This section presents a detailed description of the selected research design. It describes in detail what is to be done and how it will be done.

3.1 Research Site

This section provides a detailed description of the place where the research will take place, such as location, climate, vegetation, the people, occupation, health situation and education. However, you should only include that information that is relevant to your study.

3.2 Research Design

This section describes the plan or strategy for conducting the research. What type of study is it? What type of data will be collected and how? How will the data be analyzed and how will the findings be presented?

3.3 Study Population

This is also called the **universe**. It should be described in detail.

3.4 Sample Population

Before you draw your sample from the study population, you have to decide on your **unit of analysis**. Unit is another term for the **elements** in a sample. This means that **units of analysis** are the social entities whose characteristics are the focus of the study. In social research these may include individuals, groups, programmes, organizations and institutions, larger communities, or cultural artefacts.

3.5 Sampling Procedure

This section describes the sampling strategy to be used in the study.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

The researcher should describe how the data will be collected. He/she should specify the methods to be used in collecting both secondary and primary data. For those techniques to be used in collecting primary data, both the technique and instrument/tool should be described.

3.7 Data Processing and Analysis

This should start in the field, with checking for completeness of the data and performing quality control checks, while sorting the data by group of informants.

The plan involves:

- ◆ Sorting data
- ◆ Performing quality-control checks
- ◆ Data processing
- ◆ Data analysis

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Here the researcher should describe how he/she will ensure that ethical requirements are upheld in the study. The major ethical issues of concern are:

- ◆ Informed consent
- ◆ Privacy and confidentiality
- ◆ Anonymity
- ◆ Researcher's responsibility.

In describing the ethical standards, the researcher:

- ◆ Names the ethical problem in the study. It must originate from the methodology of the study.
- ◆ Explains its origin in the study.
- ◆ Explains how it will be managed in the study.

3.9 Work plan

4.0 References

The reference list comes at the end of the proposal, and provides the information necessary to identify and retrieve each source. It contains a list of all works cited in the proposal. It should be written according to an approved format.

5.0 Appendices

These are materials that are not sufficiently pertinent to be included in the body of the proposal. They usually consist of research instruments, letters of introduction, research approval letters, the budget, and timeframe. They may be labeled as Appendix 1, 2, 3, etc.