FREE RESEARCH RESOURCE / GUIDE 01

Research Proposal Writing Guide

A practical framework for planning a clear, feasible and ethically responsible research proposal.

What a proposal does: It explains what you want to investigate, why the question matters, how you will study it, and whether the plan is realistic.

01 Start with a focused research problem

- Choose a topic that is relevant, researchable and manageable within your time and resources.
- Define the problem using evidence, not only personal interest.
- Identify the population, setting, variables or phenomenon, and intended contribution.

02 Core proposal sections

- Working title: concise, specific, and aligned with the study.
- Background and problem statement: context, what is known, what remains uncertain, and why the gap matters.
- Aim, objectives and questions: one overall aim, measurable objectives, and questions that match the method.
- Literature review: critical synthesis of relevant studies and a defensible research gap.
- Methodology: design, setting, sample, data sources, instruments, analysis, and ethical safeguards.
- Timeline, resources and references: a realistic work plan and correctly formatted citations.

03 Example: narrow a broad topic

Too broad: “Social media and students.”
More focused: “Association between daily social-media use and self-reported study concentration among first-year university students at one institution.”
Possible question: “How is daily use duration associated with reported concentration?”

This example describes an association; it does not establish causation.

04 Match the research question to the design

- Quantitative: estimates frequencies, differences or associations using numeric data; define variables and planned statistical analysis.
- Qualitative: explores experiences, meanings or processes using interviews, observations or documents; explain sampling and thematic or other analysis.
- Mixed methods: combines qualitative and quantitative evidence; justify why both are needed and how findings will be integrated.

05 Methodology writing template

Design: “This study will use a cross-sectional survey to examine…”
Participants: “Eligible participants will be… recruited using…”
Measures: “Data will be collected through… The main variables will be…”
Analysis: “Descriptive statistics will summarize…; appropriate analyses will examine…”
Ethics: “Participation will be voluntary, consent will be obtained, and identifying data will be protected.”

Alignment test: Each research objective should connect to at least one question, a data source, an analysis method, and an expected output.

06 Literature review essentials

- Search relevant scholarly databases and record search terms and dates.
- Compare studies by methods, populations, findings and limitations rather than summarizing one paper at a time.
- Use credible, traceable sources and distinguish established findings from assumptions.
- State the specific gap your study can realistically address.

07 Ethics and feasibility

- Assess consent, privacy, sensitive information, data security and potential harm.
- Obtain institutional ethics approval when required before collecting data.
- Confirm access to participants, equipment, software, funding and supervision.
- Do not invent citations, results, approval status or participant responses.

READY-TO-USE CHECKLIST

Proposal Submission Checklist

Use this checklist before sending your proposal to a supervisor, department or funding body.

Research focus

- ☐ The title accurately reflects the topic and study setting.
- ☐ The problem statement explains a meaningful and supported gap.
- ☐ The aim, objectives and research questions are consistent.
- ☐ The proposed contribution is realistic and clearly stated.

Evidence and methods

- ☐ The literature review synthesizes relevant and credible sources.
- ☐ The study design is justified for the research questions.
- ☐ Sampling, data collection and analysis are described clearly.
- ☐ Ethics, consent, privacy and data management are addressed.

Practical readiness

- ☐ The timeline and resource needs are feasible.
- ☐ All sources are cited and listed in the required style.
- ☐ Headings, word count and formatting meet institutional rules.
- ☐ The proposal has been proofread and supervisor feedback considered.

Before submission: Check your institution’s proposal template and ethics requirements. Section names, order and required detail vary by department.

Learning resource notice: This guide provides general educational support. It does not replace supervisor guidance, institutional regulations or formal research ethics review.