

TIPS FOR WRITING A DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

The dissertation process is a key feature of your academic journey. If you continue in academic work you will need the research skills you begin to learn during this project. These are, hopefully, some helpful bits of advice for the first stage of your project, writing your proposal.

TITLE

This is of primary importance to your proposal - the ability to present your idea as a question. To do this you need to think about a title that is clearly written and focused on a problem that you can easily identify. You should be able to abstract your topic into a single question and summarize it in a single page. Throughout your academic career you will create titles and write summaries of proposed and completed work. If you struggle to explain what you propose to do, there is probably something wrong with your plan.

PROPOSAL

The proposal itself should include information on the following categories:

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

This should be short and to the point. It indicates that you have gone beyond having a general area of interest to a focused question or problem. Obviously you cannot know the answer to your question before you start but it is equally obvious that you cannot answer a question before you can articulate it.

EXISTING LITERATURE

What is the history of your problem? What information is already available? What information will add to it? How will your perspective contribute to an overall understanding of the problem? Explain and define your terms (Avoid jargon, buzzwords and name-dropping.). If you can't do so, you probably aren't thinking clearly.

AVAILABILITY OF MATERIAL

State clearly what sources of information are available to you. Give examples if possible. What kinds of information will you be collecting? Indicate that you have the skills required and have considered ethical issues and potential problems which may be specific to the proposed research.

ANALYSING INFORMATION

It is not enough to say "I plan to use sources." You must indicate what *kinds* of information you will gather, how you will organize it and how it will be analysed. Does the project require a language, quantitative ability, or experience in some other subject? Indicate that you have these required

skills (NB: Your proposal document has a place to indicate extra credits you wish to take to assist with the project).

TIMETABLE

Planning is key to a dissertation as it is a year-long project. Indicate when you plan to carry out the various phases of your work. Plan for periods of research, writing, and revision. Consider what your project may cost you and whether you can afford this.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Even though you will not have collected your information at the stage of writing a proposal, you should have thought about the containers into which you will ultimately package it. What categories of information will you be collecting and how will you present them?

CONCLUSION

A thesis proposal should demonstrate your ability to think about a problem and identify sources of information relevant to it. You may be tempted to cram into it every theory or perspective you encountered in your courses and seminars. Avoid the temptation. Be selective. The proposal shows your ability to identify relevant literature from amongst your research.

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

Your proposal will be submitted electronically