

Thesis Proposal Outline

This document was created following requests from students and some thesis supervisors; it is a sample outline only. This document is not intended to replace, substitute, or supersede any recommendation or requirement of your thesis supervisor.

“A proposal’s overt function is to persuade a committee of scholars that the project shines with the three kinds of merit all disciplines value, namely, conceptual innovation, methodological rigor, and rich, substantive content” (Przeworski, A, & Salomon, F., 1988).

1. WORKING TITLE

The title should “summarize the main idea” of your thesis (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 23). According to the APA manual, the recommended length of a title is no more than 12 words.

2. INTRODUCTION

The introduction provides the background information for your research topic, provides context, and outlines importance of your research to the field of Education. Many writers find it helpful to write this synopsis last, after they have worked out the other areas of the proposal. The introduction should not exceed two pages (500 words).

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY/RESEARCH

- a. Situating yourself in the work: How did you come to this idea?
- b. Statement of the problem: What is the purpose of this thesis? What question(s) are you trying to answer? What do you hope to learn/discover?
- c. Context of the study: Not always required, but sometimes necessary to describe the local situation (e.g. school).
- d. Significance of the study: What is the significance of this research? Why is finding an answer to this question important?
- e. Need for the study: What are the implications for this study? How will the results of your thesis research change current knowledge in the area of study?
- f. Why would this study be of interest to others in the field of Education? How will this study change/improve the lives of those within in the education system (e.g. students, teachers, parents, principals, school counsellors, etc.)?

4. QUESTIONS

Questions tend to be used in a qualitative enquiry, while hypotheses tend to be used in a quantitative enquiry (Pajares, 2007). What do you expect to learn by completing this study? What is your research objective?

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5. DELIMITATIONS AND LIMITATIONS (optional, used with some, usually quantitative methodologies)

Delimitations are those elements of your study that you CAN control. What is the scope (i.e. the boundaries) of your study? How have you narrowed down your research question? How will these choices influence the results of your study?

Limitations are those things that you CAN'T control. What are the limits of your study, as outlined? How might these limits affect the outcome?

6. DEFINITIONS (optional, used with some, usually quantitative methodologies)

Provide your reader with a plain English definition of all terms used. Definitions are particularly important when there is no agreement over the definition: What does the term mean when you use it?

7. LITERATURE REVIEW

What do we already know about this area of study? Provide a brief outline of related research from at least five (Masters) to 15 (PhD) distinct and relevant sources.

8. CONCEPTUAL/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Of particular importance for PhD theses. Provide a brief synopsis of the theories, models or academic scholars that ground your study.

9. METHOD (RESEARCH DESIGN)

Describe how you will conduct your study and why the choices you will make will give you the best possible chance to answer your questions from section 3.

- a. Why have you selected this particular method of studying your question?
- b. Outline your discovery/experimental process.
- c. Research subjects: Describe your research subjects. How will you select your research participants? What is your sample size? Why is this size an appropriate number of participants? How will you obtain the consent of your participants?
- d. How will you collect your data?
- e. How will you mitigate ethical consequences of your research?
- f. How will you analyze your data? Consider coding strategies, audit trail, reflexivity, discourse analysis.

10. PROPOSED TIMETABLE

Master's thesis students are allotted 15.0 credit hours in which to complete their research, write, and defend their thesis. Provide an outline of how/when you propose to complete that work.

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Master's thesis sample timetable:

Semester / Dates	Credit hours	Activities
Fall	3.0	Work with thesis supervisor to create a thesis proposal, complete literature review, and submit application for Research Ethics Board approval.
Winter	3.0	Submit Research Ethics application; receive Research Ethics Board approval; begin research
Spring/Summer	3.0	Complete research; analyze the data; begin to write the thesis
Fall	3.0	Write thesis; submit early drafts to thesis supervisor; work with supervisor and committee members on subsequent drafts.
Winter	3.0	Submit final draft for approval; receive approval for defense; complete defense; complete post-defense corrections to thesis

Doctoral thesis students are allotted 42.0 credit hours in which to research, write, and defend their thesis. Provide an outline of how/when you propose to complete that work.

Doctoral thesis sample timeline:

Semester / Dates	Credit hours	Activities
Fall	6.0	Literature review; comprehensive examination questions
Winter	6.0	Comprehensive examination; research proposal
Spring/Summer	6.0	Submit Research Ethics application; receive Research Ethics Board approval; begin research
Fall	6.0	Research; analysis
Winter	6.0	Analysis; writing
Spring/Summer	6.0	Writing; submit draft to thesis supervisor; work with supervisor and committee members on subsequent drafts.
Fall	6.0	Submit final draft for approval; receive approval for defense; complete defense; complete post-defense corrections to thesis

11. REFERENCES

Include references for all citations used in your proposal, in APA style.

12. APPENDICES

Include a sample of all documents and materials pertaining to your proposal.

REFERENCES

- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Hayes, M. (2007). *A sample quantitative thesis proposal*. Retrieved from <http://www.sagepub.com/creswellstudy/Sample%20Student%20Proposals/Proposal-QUAN-Hayes.pdf>
- Pajares, F. (2007). *Elements of a proposal*. Emory University. Retrieved from <http://www.des.emory.edu/mfp/proposal.html>
- Przeworski, A, & Salomon, F. (1988, September). *On the art of writing proposals: Some candid suggestions for applicants to Social Science Research Council competitions*. University of California, San Diego. Retrieved from <http://weber.ucsd.edu/~proeder/Proposals.pdf>