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How to write a research proposal-2

How to write a research proposal

When you are applying for a research degree, like the PhD, you will very probably have to write a research proposal as a part of your application file. A PhD is awarded mainly as the result of your making a genuine contribution to the state of knowledge in a field of your choice. Even though this is not the Nobel Prize yet, getting the degree means you have added something to what has previously been known on the subject you have researched. But first you have to prove you are capable of making such a contribution, and therefore write a research proposal that meets certain standards. The goal of a research proposal (RP) is to present and justify a research idea you have and to present the practical ways in which you think this research should be conducted.

When you are writing a RP, keep in mind that it will enter a competition, being read in line with quite a few other RPs. You have to come up with a document that has an impact upon the reader: write clearly and well structured so that your message gets across easily. Basically, your RP has to answer three big questions: what research project will you undertake, why is important to know that thing and how will you proceed to make that research.

In order to draw the researcher's attention upon your paper, write an introduction with impact, and that leads to the formulation of your hypothesis. The research hypothesis has to be specific, concise (one phrase) and to lead to the advancement of the knowledge in the field in some way. Writing the hypothesis in a concise manner and, first, coming up with a good hypothesis is a difficult mission. This is actually the core of your application: you're going to a university to do this very piece of research. Compared to this, the rest of the application is background scenery. Take your time to think of it. When you have an idea, be careful at the formulation. A well-written hypothesis is something of an essay's thesis: it provides a statement that can be tested (argues ahead one of the possible answers to a problem), it is an idea, a concept, and not a mere fact, and is summed up in one phrase. In some cases, you will have no idea what the possible answer to a problem worth being researched is, but you will be able to think of a way to solve that problem, and find out the answer in the meantime. It's ok in this case, to formulate a research question, rather than a hypothesis. Let those cases be rare, in any way.

Another piece of advice when writing your hypothesis, regarding the trendy research fields: chances are great that they're trendy because somebody has already made that exciting discovery, or wrote that splendid paper that awoke everybody's interest in the first place. If you're in one of these fields, try to get a fresh point of view upon the subject; make new connections, don't be 100% mainstream. This will make the project even more stimulating for the reader. Imagine that you are writing about the trendiest subject, with absolutely no change in the point of view, and you

are given the chance to make the research. Trends come and go, fast; what are the chances that, in four years' time, when your research is done and you are ready to publish your results, one of those well-known professors who dispose of huge research grants has already said whatever you had to say?

Remember how, in a structured essay, right after the thesis you would present the organisation of your essay, by enumerating the main arguments you were going to present? Same thing should happen in a RP. After stating your thesis, you should give a short account of your answers to those three questions mention earlier. State, in a few phrases, what will be learned from your research, that your project will make a difference, and why is that important to be known. You will have to elaborate on both of these later in the paper.

The next step in writing your proposal is to prove that that particular piece of research has not been done yet. This section is usually called Literature Review. Inside it, you have to enumerate and critically analyze an impressive list of boring bibliography. The conclusion you should - objectively! - reach is that your idea of research has not been undertaken yet. Even more, you use this opportunity to prove solid theoretical knowledge in the field, and build the theoretical bases of your project. One tip: don't review all the articles and books in the fields even if you mention them in the bibliography list; pay attention in your analysis to those you will build on. Another one: avoid jargon when writing your RP. The chances are great that the person(s) who will read your and another 1000 research proposals are not specialists in that very field - niche you are examining. If you are applying for a grant with or foundation or something similar, it might happen that those reading your paper are not even professors, but recruiters, donors, etc. And even if they actually are professors, one of the reasons busy people like them agree to undertake a huge, and sometimes voluntary, work, is the desire to meet some diversity, some change from their work - so maybe they'll read applications for another specialisation. The capacity to get your message across in clear, easy-to-grasp concepts and phrases is one of the winning papers' most important advantages.

So far, you have proven you have a research idea, that you are familiar with the field, and that your idea is new. Now, why should your project be worth researching? Because it advances knowledge, ok. But is this knowledge that anybody will need? Maybe nobody knows for sure how the shoelaces were being tied in the XIXth century, but who cares, beyond two lace-tying specialists? Find arguments to convince the reader that s/he should give you money for that research: practical use, accelerating the development of knowledge in your or other fields, opening new research possibilities, a better understanding of facts that will allow a more appropriate course of action are possible reasons. Be clear and specific. Don't promise to save the world, it might be too much to start with. Even James Bond succeeds that only towards the end of the movie.

We approach now one of the most difficult parts of writing a research proposal: the methodology. In short, what actions are you going to take in order to answer the question? When will you know whether the hypothesis has been proven wrong, or has survived enough tests to be considered, for now, valid? Those tests and the way you are supposed to handle them to give rigor to your research is what is understood under methods. Methods divide in qualitative (interviews, questionnaires) and quantitative (statistics, stuff that deals intensively with numbers). For some projects qualitative methods are more appropriate, for some quantitative, while for most a mixture of the two is adequate. You should pick your methods and justify your choice. Research methodology, however, is too a complicated thing to be explained here. And this is why it's so tough: not much attention is given to teaching it in Eastern Europe. Try, before writing your RP, to read a bit more about methodology - on the Internet you will find for sure some articles - and decide which methods suit your project best. Don't forget: reading theoretical pieces of your work and providing a critical analysis of those is also a kind of research. It's fine to provide a rough schedule of your research; some grant programs will also require a detailed budget, even though for scholarships this is unlikely.

Conclusions: After working your way through the difficult methodological part, you only have to write your conclusions. Shortly recap why your hypothesis is new, why it advances knowledge, why is it worth researching and how, from a practical point of view, are you going to do that. Overall, the capacity of your project to answer the research question should come out crystal clear from the body of the paper, and especially from the conclusions. If this happens, it means you have a well-written RP, and you have just increased your chances for having a successful application.

One last word: how big should your RP be? In most cases, this is specified in the application form. If it is not, we suggest that you keep it at about 1500 words (that's 3 pages, single-spaced, with 12 size Times New Roman). In fewer words it can be really tough to write a good RP. With more you might bore your readers. Which we hope will not happen.

Good luck!

Source: http://www.eastchance.com/howto/res_prop.asp