



## **STEPS TO WRITING A SUCCESSFUL PROJECT PROPOSAL**

### **Master of Counselling (MC) Program**

### **University of Lethbridge<sup>i</sup>**

#### **Office of Graduate Studies & Research in Education Requirements**

The Office of Graduate Studies and Research in Education requires a written proposal (5 – 7 pages for MC students, excluding references, double spaced with headings as noted below) in APA format. For steps in the approval process students and supervisors should refer to the *Guidelines for Completing the Project*.

#### **Purposes of a Proposal**

The project proposal:

- allows the writer to clarify what it is he/she wants to do, why and how he/she wants to do it,
- presents what she/he wants to do in the manner and timeframe proposed, and
- once approved, provides a written contract between the student and the project supervisor

#### **Components of a Project Proposal**

##### **1. Title**

The title of the project is very significant. It will go on the spine of the published document when it is bound and becomes accessible in the University of Lethbridge Library. The title is one of the ways that people using the University of Lethbridge electronic search engine will locate the project in the holdings. The title must be clear, appropriate for the topic and less than 45 characters, including spaces and punctuation.

##### **2. Introduction (WHAT is this about?)**

The Introduction to the project provides a general introduction to the phenomena or issue of interest, and is usually contained in 2 pages. The issue or problem under investigation is described, and background and/or context for understanding the nature of the issue is provided. In writing this section, students should provide answers to two main questions:

- What is the project all about?
- Why is the project important or worthwhile?

The Introduction will also typically conclude with a brief description of the structure of the remainder of the document.

### **3. Research Question (WHAT am I trying to find out? WHY?)**

Every project must state a research question or a statement on what is the intent of the project. It is not a "null-hypothesis statement" but rather you are stating the big, overarching question that is guiding your study. Several smaller questions may even be nested in the larger one.

The research question and the title are two required elements of all proposals. The connections between the two must be obvious. (Hopefully, they are obvious to the writer, but they may not be to the audience.)

Where the research question appears in the proposal is something each writer must decide. It could appear in the introduction; it could follow the introduction or the background or the literature review or it could appear within any of the above sections. Just don't leave it until the reference section!

### **4. Method (HOW? WHO? WHERE?)**

*(This section must make sense within the context of the document and be linked with the sections preceding it.)*

In this section provide a clear, explicit and thorough description of how you will complete your project and the timetable for completing each step. For example, what databases will you be using during your literature review. What search terms and exclusion criteria will you be using? When will you be starting your literature review and when will it be finished?

It is the writer's responsibility to ensure that the proposal is clear about what is being proposed, with whom, where and when. (WHY should already have been explained.) Approximately 1-2 paragraphs is suitable for this section.

A project does not involve interviewing people or collecting raw data as this type of collection of data would require ethics approval and a host of other documents would need to be created such as informed consent.

This section needs to include a statement that you will adhere to an approved code of ethics of your selection.

### **5. Project (What do I do when I'm done doing what I said I would do?)**

Describe what the final product will look like. For example, if it is a manual, provide details about the manual's length, formatting style, number of lessons, etc. If the product is to be something creative and other than text, provide examples of what the final product might look like. If the proposal includes writing a series of fictionalized autobiographical accounts, a sample should be included in the proposal. If the proposal includes a website describe it.

Title Page  
Acknowledgements Page  
Abstract  
Table of Contents  
Chapter 1: Overview (proposed number of pages: )  
Sub headings:  
a.  
b.  
c.  
Chapter 2: Review of Literature (proposed number of pages: )  
Sub headings:  
a.  
b.  
c.  
Chapter 3: Methods (proposed number of pages: )  
Chapter 4: Outcome  
a.  
b.  
c.  
Chapter 5: Synthesis  
a. Strengths  
b. Limitations  
c. Recommended Future Research  
  
References

## 6. Timeline

Include a draft timeline from start to finish. Start with the proposed convocation date and work backwards to revising the final draft of project (expect at least two to three rewrites). Availability of the supervisor is also very important to consider and factor in to your timeline.

## 7. References

References to anything cited in the text of the proposal must adhere to APA guidelines. (As a matter of fact the entire proposal needs to adhere to APA guidelines). APA formatting requires only those materials cited or referred to in the text be listed in the References. A separate section entitled "Bibliography" lists other materials (books, journal articles, etc.) related to the project but not specifically referred to in the document.

Buy an APA manual. The \$40.00 is worth the time and frustration it will save or find an editor who knows APA and will edit/proofread your text for APA formatting.

## A Few Final Words of Encouragement and Wisdom . . .

For most projects, one third of the entire time allotted to doing the project can be taken up with writing the proposal. It is a creative, thinking, clarifying, explorative process, at the end of which you will have created/produced a persuasive and realistic document which is as definitive as possible without being a straight jacket.

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<sup>i</sup> Adapted from Cynthia Chambers