

Writing Your PG Research Project Proposal

Typically, most research project proposals will contain the following elements:

- The proposed title of your research project
- An outline of the scope and rationale of the project
- An overview of previous research in your selected topic area, and what impact, if any, this will have on the theoretical approach and direction of your research, including methodology
- A description of the methodology and data sources to be used
- An indication of which aspects of any taught undergraduate or postgraduate syllabus will be used in the research, including any special theories/models
- Proposed chapter headings and sub-headings for the project report
- A work programme, complete with timetable.

This worksheet offers a framework for preparing your research Project proposal, and for discussion with your tutor or supervisor. Write in the spaces shown on the sheet.

What is the **main aim** of your research?
Write just one or two sentences that summarise the overall objective of your project.



Now identify up to three specific research questions that flow from this main research aim. But first, ask yourself **will you be able to find answers easily to them?** Will you be able to get access to information that can lead to possible resolution of the questions raised? If 'no', then identify questions where information is more accessible.

It is generally better to generate a small number of research questions to address in depth, rather than a larger number at a more superficial level.

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3

What is the **background** to your interest in this topic area and in pursuing this research area? Summarise briefly the reasons why this topic is likely to be of interest to you and others. For example, might there be any practical applications for your research outside the university?

What types of research apply to your proposed project? (Your research proposal may contain more than one type):

Exploratory	Descriptive	Analytical	Predictive
<p>Exploratory research is undertaken when few or no previous studies exist. The aim is to look for patterns, hypotheses or ideas that can be tested and will form the basis for further research.</p> <p>Typical research techniques would include case studies, observation and reviews of previous related studies and data.</p>	<p>Descriptive research can be used to identify and classify the elements or characteristics of the subject, e.g. number of days lost because of industrial action.</p> <p>Quantitative techniques are often used to collect, analyse and summarise data.</p>	<p>Analytical research often extends the Descriptive approach to suggest or explain why or how something is happening, e.g. underlying causes of industrial action.</p> <p>An important feature of this type of research is in locating and identifying the different factors (or variables) involved.</p>	<p>The aim of Predictive research is to speculate intelligently on future possibilities, based on close analysis of available evidence of cause and effect, e.g. predicting when and where future industrial action might take place</p>

Write in this space how you would categorize your research:

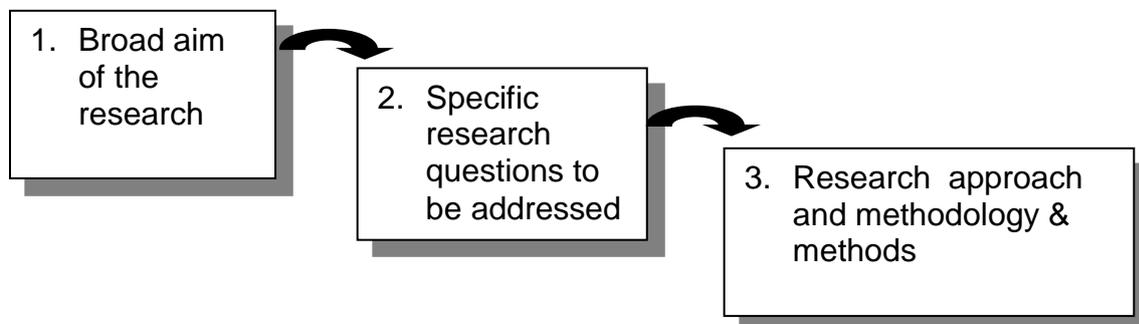
Review of previous research

In the research review section of the proposal you outline what previous research has been done on the topic and how it has guided or informed your own research. You can engage with some or all of the following questions:

- What previous research has already been done on this topic? Who did it, when and why?
- What conclusions did previous researchers reach?
- How relevant are these conclusions today generally and for your own research?
- How will your research build on previous research? How is it similar or different?
- How has previous research influenced your research methodology and methods?
- Who are the principal commentators & theorists in the subject you want to research?
- What theories, models or practices were particularly relevant to prepare or analyse your research topic and findings?

Don't forget

The research topic, the research questions you intend to raise and previous work done on this topic, will influence your methodology; see below.



Research Approach

You also need to think about the theoretical approach you are likely to adopt in your research. It is likely that this topic will have been presented and discussed in any Research Methods module that you have completed and is outlined in detail in most research methods text books.

However, just to remind you of a few basic points:

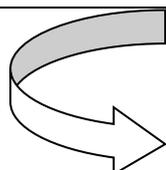
Research approaches:

Research can be approached in the following ways:

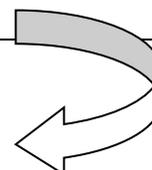
1. Quantitative/Qualitative
2. Applied/Basic
3. Deductive/Inductive

1. Quantitative/Qualitative research

Quantitative	Qualitative
<p>The emphasis of Quantitative research is on collecting and analysing numerical data; it concentrates on measuring the scale, range, frequency etc. of phenomena.</p> <p>This type of research, although harder to design initially, is usually highly detailed and structured and results can be easily collated and presented statistically.</p>	<p>Qualitative research is more subjective in nature than Quantitative research and involves examining and reflecting on the less tangible aspects of a research subject, e.g. values, attitudes, perceptions.</p> <p>Although this type of research can be easier to start, it can be often difficult to interpret and present the findings; the findings can also be challenged more easily.</p>



Many research projects **combine** a number of approaches, e.g. may use both quantitative and qualitative approaches



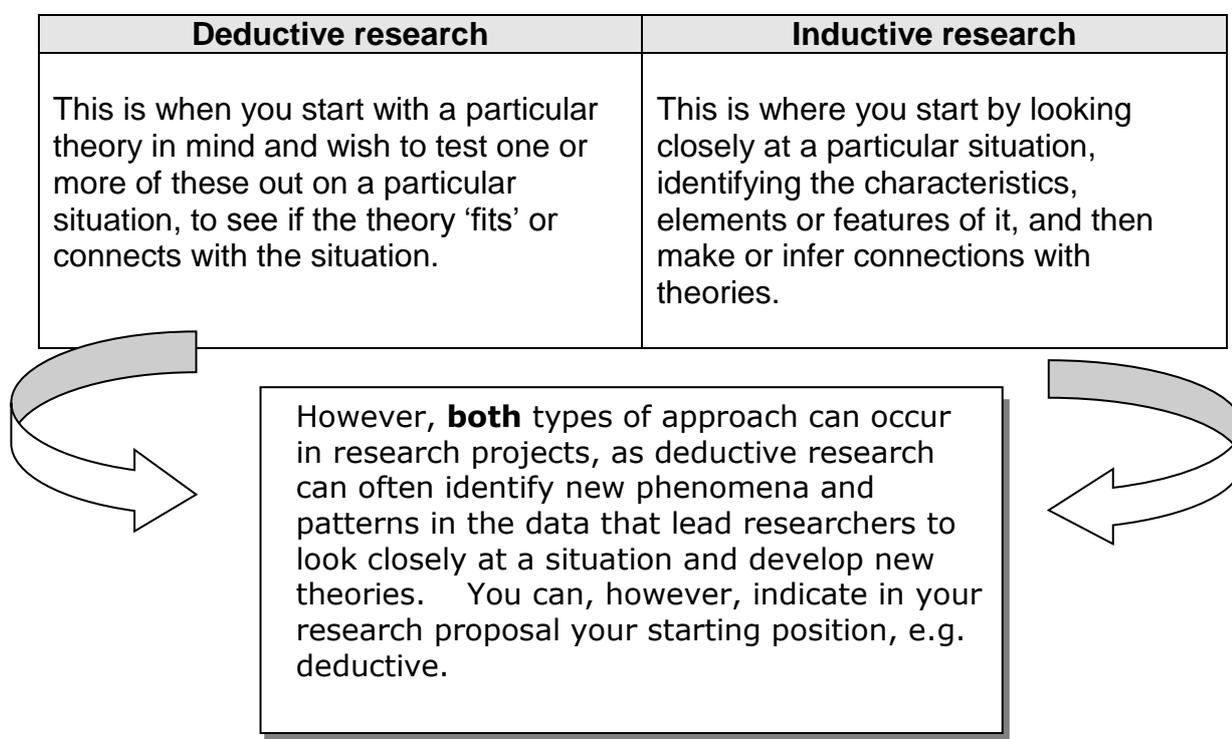
2. Basic/Applied research

The primary aim of **Basic Research** is to improve knowledge generally, without any particular applied purpose in mind at the outset.

Applied Research is designed from the start to apply its findings to a particular situation.

3. Deductive/Inductive research

This is about your starting point for the investigation of the research questions or issues you wish to pursue.



Methodology and research methods

The term **methodology** refers to the broad overall approaches and perspectives to the research process and is concerned with the following main issues:

- **Why and how and where** you will collect certain data
- **How** you will collate and analyse it

Research **methods** refers only to the various specific tools or ways data can be collected and analysed, for example your sampling techniques, the questionnaires you produce, or interview or observation checklists used in the study.

Primary and secondary research data

- Where and how will you gather **secondary data**? Is it easily available?
- Where, how, and when will you gather **primary data**, if applicable?

Secondary data

Primary data

Methodology checklist (use the checklist when writing this section of Your proposal to remind you what might need to be included; not all the questions shown may be relevant to your research).

	Checklist
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What philosophical approach will you take to your research, e.g. Qualitative/Quantitative? Inductive/Deductive? • Why will you adopt this approach? • What methods (to gather primary and/or secondary data) have you decided to use and why? • What criteria will you adopt for collecting this data (e.g. target number, age, gender, occupational etc) and why? • What is your the target sample number? What type of sample will it be, e.g. a random sample? • Where will you collect the data? • When will you collect it? • Who will be involved in the collection? • How will you collect it? • How will you analyse it? • What logistical or other problems do you anticipate you might encounter in collecting or analysing it? 	

Time scale

You can now move on to thinking about the time scale for your research. When you are thinking about the data collection stage, **allow ample time** for this, as if you are trying to arrange to talk to people, or gather data from questionnaires, it can take much longer than you think to organise.

It can be notoriously difficult to contact busy people and agree a meeting time when both the researcher and interviewee are free. Busy people are also bad at responding to questionnaires, which can be pushed to the bottom of the in-tray, and often constant but polite chivvying is needed to encourage people to reply to questionnaires.

This is an extract from one post-graduate student's proposed work schedule for his research project report:

Work programme and timetable

14 June	Submit questionnaire and cover letters for copying
17 June	Issue questionnaires
17 July	Deadline for questionnaire responses
17 July – 22 July	Initial assessment and analysis of response data and start the write-up
30 July – 3 August	Complete write-up of first sections and further analyse data
10 August	Draft one complete
15 August	Draft two complete
20 August	Draft three (as required) complete
27 August	Final check
29 August	Submit to print shop and School on return

Frequency of meetings with supervisor to be agreed.

Common Problems with Research

- Underestimating the amount of work to final completion:
This can be a problem, particularly at the data collection, collation and final writing stages.

- Being over-optimistic about the return response to questionnaires and other ways of generating primary data:
Be realistic about the target you set for yourself. Give people a good reason to fill in your questionnaire or to talk to you.



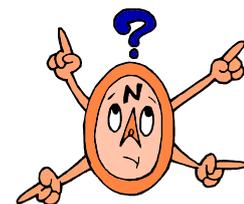
- Coping with a long piece of work:
Research can be very tiring process, particularly in the latter stages. Build rest days in for yourself; don't work every day of the week.

- Failing to keep notes and record references:
It can be infuriating if you want to cite a source in your report, but realise you have lost details of the source – or failed to note the details properly in the first place!



- Failing to take a critical/analytical perspective:
This can happen when the research offers little analysis and conclusions are drawn without much supporting evidence or as a result of guesswork!

- Lacking focus:
This can happen when there are no clear points or conclusions emerging from the research. To avoid this situation, you need to be clear right from the start what specific questions you want to address in the project – and keep focused on these.



- Relying only on supervisors:
The supervisor is an important source of help, but you must not rely on them for total support! You can get help from other students, the Academic Skills Advice service, friends etc. It is a good idea to talk to as many people as possible, as explaining it to someone else helps you clarify what you are trying to do and say.

Plagiarism!



Don't be tempted.

Avoid plagiarism by referencing your sources. You should reference all evidence including:

- The source of all statistics from external sources used in your report
- The source of all quotations used
- The source of specialist knowledge you have paraphrased or summarised
- The source of any definitions quoted or paraphrased
- The source of any previous external research summarised
- The source of any theory, model, idea, or working practice that you refer to in your text.