Description

A research proposal is essentially a plan for work in order to test a hypothesis or set of hypotheses in order to answer a research question. One of the most important things to bear in mind when drafting a proposal is the fact that authors are required to tailor it to suit the audience. If the document being written is a PhD research proposal, it is imperative that authors follow the guidelines laid out by the university or faculty for this type of document. A PhD research proposal, as an example, will be read by experts in the field. This means that authors will be expected to use jargon specific to their area. If the research proposal forms part of a grant application, authors would have to write it so that reviewers who might not be as familiar with their specialty can easily understand the research problem and why the project should receive funding. A typical research proposal will generally include a title, summary of the aims and expected outcomes, literature review, research methodology, proposed timeline, and references. The characteristics of a good research title all generally focus on catching the reader's attention. Again, word limits, formatting, and what is considered essential content will depend on the institution or faculty requirements and should be strictly adhered to.

Writing An Effective Research Proposal

Since the details of what should be in the research proposal will be governed by the institution, the rest of this article will focus on general hints to write a high-quality research proposal.

1. Although introduction is the first major section, it is not mandatory that it has to be written first. Authors may find it easier to start writing the research methodology since methods have usually been standardized. Once this is on paper, it will help authors feel accomplished and will no longer be intimidated by a blank page.
2. An effective research title should be easily understood by someone who is not a specialist in the field. It should be seen as more of a marketing tool than a demonstration of scientific knowledge. Authors should read the title aloud. Authors should consider if the title is easily understood and if the significance of what they are trying to accomplish clear. The purpose of the title is to pique the interest of the reader; which is why it needs to be concise and easily understood while communicating why this research needs to be done.
3. Authors should ensure that the purpose of the research is apparent from the beginning of the document how the study could improve or change lives. If the research is not applied, this will be harder to justify but authors can cite examples of blue skies research that has led to technologies

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that are in use today. It is fairly well accepted by the research community that both fundamental and applied research projects are necessary. It is critical that anyone who reads the document agrees that the research question needs to be answered.

4. Demonstrate competence. Even if we all agree that the PhD research proposal must be executed, the proposal will not be successful without some key elements. One of these elements is demonstrating that the infrastructure is in place to support the execution of the experiments. The team that will be conducting the work is also a critical component of this success. Authors should include evidence of their track record where possible to inspire confidence that they are the person for the job. Where authors lack competence, they may include collaborators with the necessary skills to help answer the research question.
5. Authors should never underestimate how getting others to review their proposal can improve it. Often the suggestions will help clarify the document or they may suggest a new angle that has been missed out. Once authors have incorporated any suggestions that were found useful, it would be a good idea to ask a new person to review it before submission. Doing suggested corrections at this stage generally, means there will be fewer problems with the study identified by reviewers.
6. Authors must remember that the proposal is not the final thesis. Reviewers expect proposals to change as the study commences. The results obtained may require authors to change direction or add new sections and that is acceptable. The most important thing is that authors continue to use the scientific method to find answers to their stated research question.

Key Points to Remember

These are just some guidelines on writing a research proposal. Writing a successful PhD research proposal means remembering to write for a specific audience and adhering to the format prescribed by the institution. There are a few characteristics of a good research title but the main thing authors need to remember is that the point of the title is to hold the reader's attention and pique their interest in the rest of the research proposal. Authors should never submit the proposal without having someone else review it and should always feel free to work on whatever section they need to – there is no rule that says it has to be written in its presentation order.

Category

1. Manuscripts & Grants
2. Reporting Research

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