
DISSERTATION PROPOSAL MBA and MSc

What is the proposal?

The proposal stage of your dissertation is critical. If your proposal is good, the rest of your research will fall into place. Its purpose is for you to:

- draw together your initial ideas into a workable project outline;
- have an agreed dissertation outline in place early enough to give you reasonable time to complete it;
- clarify to yourself and, of necessary, to others, that your research plans are feasible;
- prepare the groundwork for gathering the data or material that you need; and
- gain formal approval.

What do you need to do?

For your own purposes in planning your research, it is helpful to consider the proposal stage as encompassing the whole process from analysing the assignment brief through to that point when you are clear, in your own mind, what you will research and how. Even if you are not formally required to write up such a detailed proposal, it is advisable to do so.

Aspects of the proposal stage

- 1) Know the formal requirements for the dissertation brief**, to ensure your proposal meets it.
- 2) Research the background**, from literature search to a first draft of your literature review, to ensure the proposal is grounded in research in your field.

- 3) **Settle on a topic**, title and/or hypothesis, so that your research is suitably focused.
- 4) **Decide on a methodology**, so you are clear why you are approaching your research in the way chosen.
- 5) **Select your methods**, piloting them so you know they work before finalising the proposal.
- 6) **Think through ethical implications**, so you know that your research complies with ethics policies.
- 7) **Plan and prepare in detail**, so you know that the project is feasible and that you are ready to begin.
- 8) **Write up the proposal** to meet requirements.

STRUCTURE OF THE PROPOSAL

1. Title

Give your dissertation proposal a working title, which may or may not become the title of the dissertation.

2. Background and overview

Explain your interest or any previous work you have done on the topic. Also, describe any reading or any personal experience that has led you to want to research on the topic. You should also include a short statement explaining the benefits, which you think, will be derived from the research you are proposing.

3. Problem Definition

From the wider background, you have just described you should select a management problem and explain it clearly.

4. Research Question

Your management problem must be converted into a research question, e.g. What is the relationship between pricing and certain customer segments or the relationship between IT outsourcing and staff morale?

5. Research Methodology

Discuss the kinds of sources you hope to consult and the methods you will be using to extract and process the information you will be gathering in as much detail as is possible at this stage. As the project is underway you might find the need to revise your methodology. You must explain how you will be collecting the data you need in order to address your research question. If you are conducting questionnaires or interviews you should explain what sample you will be using (size, criteria, method) and also how you will be approaching the people in your sample. You should also give an indication as to whether you will be testing hypotheses quantitatively or using qualitative methods, such as interviews or semi-structured questionnaires.

6. Problems and Limitations

Describe the problems you expect to encounter and how you hope to solve them. For example, texts might be unavailable, people you hope to interview might be unwilling to participate, you might not have enough time, etc. Try to imagine every possible problem so that you have contingency plans and the project does not become derailed.

7. Bibliography

List the books and articles that you have already consulted. It is important to keep full bibliographic records of the books and articles that you use and quote in your text, so that when the time comes for writing up you do not waste valuable time looking for such information.

8. Timetable

