

MASTER OF EDUCATION IN EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

Guidelines for Thesis Proposal

The thesis proposal is an academic document that explains a student's research plans. In its final form it represents a contract between the student, their supervisor and the other members of their committee. It represents the student's plans in a moment in time and may be subject to revisions and modifications as the research unfolds, following advice from and with the agreement of the supervisor and committee members.

The proposal is written by the graduate student, but feedback will be provided by the supervisor and other committee members as appropriate. The final version of the proposal should be presented to the committee and then copied to the Graduate Director and the Administrator. The length of the proposal will vary but should generally fall in the range 8,000-15,000 words.

The exact format of the proposal may vary according to the nature of the proposal and on the advice of the supervisor. A typical arrangement is shown below:

CONTENT

1. **Front page** : title, name, program, date, contact details;
2. **Abstract**: one page summarizing the research question, the significance of the topic, the conceptual or theoretical framework, methodology and the nature of the results anticipated;
3. **A table of contents**;
4. **Introduction**: the research question, its educational or social relevance/significance, potential contribution of the research, an overview of your procedural plans;
5. Research question(s): the topic, the problem or questions to be investigated, any challenges anticipated. An explanation of the reason for doing the study, which should be derived directly from the literature or from compelling personal or professional reasons for pursuing the investigation. It could be related to one or more of the following situations:
 - A professional conundrum
 - A current debate in the field
 - A gap in the literature
 - A lack of recent studies
 - A lack of Canadian studies
 - Inconclusive results
 - Ambiguous terminology and/or definition
 - Poor measurement devices (weak instrumentation)
 - Missing factors
 - Debatable statistical analyses;

6. **Rationale:** why has this topic/question been chosen? What is its relevance academically and/or to educational practice? A clear rationale underpins a successful thesis. In general, there are two components to every problem. The first is a general statement telling the reader exactly what is expected to be the research focus. The second component is more specific and often stated in the form of a series of empirical questions, reflecting the conceptual framework developed from the literature review.
7. **Literature review:** how does the literature inform your research question(s)? What is the state of existing knowledge and what gaps exist in that knowledge? How does the literature inform or determine your conceptual framework?
8. **Methodology:** How do the proposed methods fit with the research question(s) and the conceptual framework underpinning them? What is the overall plan? Who are the participants (if any)? What procedures will be used and how valid and reliable are they? What data will be collected and what sampling techniques used? What is the timeline for the work (including seeking ethical approval) and how feasible is the proposal?
9. **Data analysis:** how will the data be analysed to generate answers to the research question(s)? The type of test(s) to be used for quantitative analysis should be specified and justified. For qualitative analysis the techniques for exploring the data should be specified and justified.
10. **Anticipated results:** what contribution to the understanding of the topic is expected? What are the likely limitations? Every study has limitations and it is important to recognize this from the outset.
11. **Ethical considerations:** proposals must include a discussion how participants may be placed at risk as a result of participation in the study and the steps planned to minimize these. Reference should be made to the ethical review processes to be conducted prior to commencement of the study.
12. **References:** list all of the sources cited. Follow APA guidelines.
13. **Appendices:** these may be used to record any documents directly related to the proposal, such as consent forms.

***Some of the content has been based on guidelines available from Brock University and OISE.