

Preparing a research proposal

Introduction

The main purpose of a research proposal is to outline a study's objectives, methodology and significance in order to secure approval, funding or support.

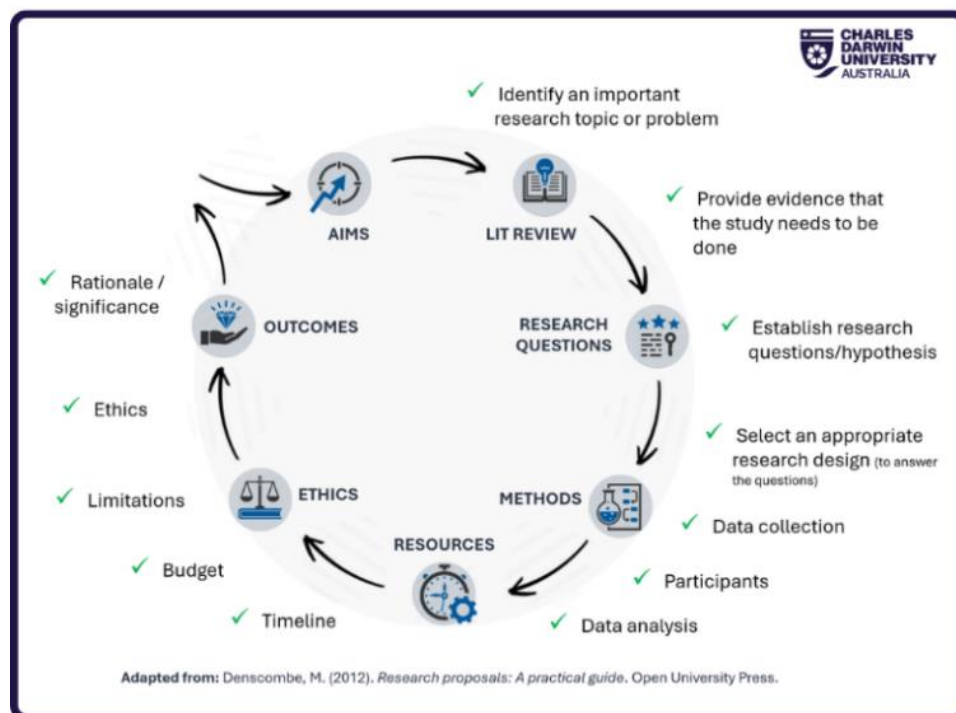
Purpose

A research proposal is a structured document that outlines your planned research. It answers three basic questions:

- What is the focus of your research?
- Why is your research important?
- How will your research be conducted?

Writing a research proposal

A research proposal follows a structured process to ensure a well-planned and rigorous study. This cycle is divided into key stages that assist researchers in developing a clear, feasible and impactful proposal that secures approval and funding.



Content

A research proposal contains many of the following:

- Title
- Introduction/Overview
- Rationale/significance
- Literature review
- Aims/Research questions
- Methodology
 - Research design
 - Participant sampling
 - Data gathering methods
 - Data analysis
- Limitations
- Ethical considerations
- Timeline and budget
- References

Title: your title will likely evolve over time but it should reflect the main topic, method and scope of your study. At CDU, titles must not exceed 20 words. Use key words to enhance searchability

Introduction: begin your introduction with an overview to engage the reader and establish relevance, then narrow the focus by providing context, outlining the research problem, stating the general aim and its significance.

Rationale/Significance: this section explains why your research is important and often contains an overview of the field or issue, the research gap and its relevance, the research purpose and a link to institutional or global goals.

Literature review: this section ensures the study is well-informed and will contribute to the academic community. It is important to keep track of your data to compare, visualise relationships between themes, sources and emerging trends.

Aims/Research questions: Identifying a research gap directly shapes the aims of the study. The gap should align with the researcher's interests where possible. It is important to be explicit, so action-oriented verbs like 'explore', 'investigate', 'examine' or 'evaluate' are commonly used. Research questions must also align with methodological choices. For quantitative research, clearly defined and measurable variables ensure testability. In contrast, qualitative research benefits from more open-ended questions to ensure in-depth exploration.

Methodology: At the proposal stage, full research design is not required; instead, you should focus on a high-level overview of your approach to allow the judging panel to assess its viability. You should include your main strategy (e.g. quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods) and key practical steps such as data collection methods and analytical frameworks. This may include participant sampling, data gathering and data analysis.

Limitations: Every research project has some limitations such as time, resources or methodology. These must be acknowledged, along with possible ways to mitigate their impacts.

Ethical considerations: This section is critical if your research involves human participants. You should discuss any ethical issues and how you might address them. For example, how will you ensure informed consent and maintain personal and data security.

Timeline and budget: This section summarises what resources are needed to complete your research, including participants, and any services or equipment you may need. You will also provide a timeline of task and milestones in the research process.

References: Referencing style can vary according to research field, but it is important that all academic sources are identified in your bibliography.