
RESEARCH PROPOSAL GUIDE

Developing and submitting a research proposal

This Guide is part of the series of Guides to help Master's and Doctoral students in successfully completing their studies. The other Guides thus far are: the *Thesis Guide* and the *Supervision Guide*.

This *Research Proposal Guide* aims to help you develop a sound proposal, one that will help you to write your thesis in a focused and disciplined way. Research proposals, however, differ from subject area to subject area. There is no single format. Each research project is different, but there are some central features that all proposals share. This Guide tries to address the key components of a proposal:

- A description of the research problem;
- An argument as to why the problem is interesting and important;
- A review of the literature relevant to the research problem;
- A description of the way in which the problem will be approached and the proposed research methodology;

The research proposal is a fundamental part of the process of thesis production. Without a clear proposal, it is unlikely that you will be able to embark on a systematic investigation and discussion of a problematic issue in your area of research. The initial step of the process starts with an idea of what you would like to investigate. This idea is then formulated into a research problem question. The procedure you propose to follow in order to answer the problem question is your research design. You then write this up in your research proposal. So, you see, the proposal is already a significant way towards developing your research project. Once your research proposal has been finalized, you start on your actual thesis. It is worth investing time and effort into developing a sound proposal – the more rigorous the proposal, the easier the writing of the thesis. Of course, a proposal cannot anticipate all the findings you may arrive at in your investigation, but a clear map through the terrain of the research area will prevent you from losing your way in the entangled field.

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1. WHAT IS A RESEARCH PROPOSAL?

Research is an activity that is essentially in the public domain. The kinds of issues that are being researched, the way in which they are addressed and investigated, and the dissemination of the findings, are all embedded in shared practices. Becoming a researcher is like joining an academic conversation. You listen to what the topic of conversation is, you note who responds to whom, you become aware of certain groupings and dominant trends, and you observe certain similarities and differences that emerge. You are part of a community of “discussants”, sharing ideas, building on what others have said, replicating findings, asking questions and contributing to the public debate. It is, therefore, appropriate that your proposed research is laid out for inspection and comment by others in the academic community.

The research proposal is a planning document that outlines your thinking about a research problem and describes what is to be studied and how. The thesis writing is a demanding project for which you need to plan. Without proper planning, it is very likely that your reading will lack direction, your writing will lack focus and your data collection will run into major problems. Of course, having a research proposal is no guarantee that you will avoid these dangers, but having a clear proposal will certainly minimize wasted time.

The main challenges you will be faced with in writing your proposal are:

- To move from a research idea to a research problem;
- To gain clarity on the unit of analysis;
- To select an appropriate research design;
- To conform to the style and format of a proposal.

2. WHY DO I NEED A RESEARCH PROPOSAL?

Imagine that you are planning a journey by car from Cape Town to Pietersburg. Before you leave, you make certain arrangements: buy a map, plan the route, fill up the car, organize someone to feed the cat while you are away, telephone friends in Bloemfontein to arrange for you to stay overnight, draw money from the bank, pack food for the trip, etc. Just so with the research journey. Like a traveller who aims to undertake a journey, the proposal is your map, your itinerary, the preparations you've undertaken and list of necessary provisions for the journey. The research proposal is a way of thinking clearly about the destination you want to get to, the means of getting there and the arrangements you have to make in order to undertake the research. Without such a proposal, you might very easily get lost.

A research proposal is a useful document to you, your supervisor, your funders and the broader research community. For **you, the student**, it is helpful in that it outlines your thinking about what you will be investigating - the focus, the limits, the logical development of your investigation and the methods you will be using to investigate the topic. The better your planning, the better your research undertaking will be organized. Through the development of the proposal, you come to a clearer understanding of the literature, the main considerations, the potential pitfalls, the perspective from which to approach your research, and the ways in which you will gather information from available sources.

For your **supervisor**, a proposal is an indication of whether you have done adequate thinking about the topic and sufficient preparation for the study. It also gives your supervisor an indication of your ability to put your ideas into clear and logical writing. A proposal forms the basis of a kind of contract between you and your supervisor - it effectively says what you wish to study and how. It gives you and your supervisor a plan of action to follow in order to reach completion of the thesis (your ultimate aim!).

For **funders** the proposal gives a clear indication of whether you have thought clearly about the topic, whether it is something feasible and worth supporting. And for the rest of the **academic community**, it is an indication of the focus of your investigation and how it links to the ongoing debates in the literature.

The research proposal is your opportunity to persuade the academic community that you know what you are talking about. That you have thought through the issues involved and are going to deliver. That it is worthwhile to take the risk and give you licence to get on with it. (Robson, C. 1994. *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd edition, Appendix A)

Remember that you are the one who will invest most in this project and are the one who has most to lose if you get into a situation where the research is a failure or you find that you have wasted enormous amounts of time going in the wrong direction. You want the best insurance policy you can get. So, it is worth investing time and effort in developing a good research proposal.

A good research proposal will help you:

- define and formulate your research question;
- narrow down the study to a manageable form within the prescribed time limits;

- structure the development of your writing;
- avoid wasting time in the literature search and data collection stages of the project.

3 *ON WHAT CRITERIA ARE RESEARCH PROPOSALS JUDGED?*

Bear in mind that different supervisors and examiners look for different things. Discuss with your supervisor the main points that you should develop clearly in your proposal. However, in general the following questions are usually considered in the examination of proposals:

- X Do you have a clear idea of what you plan to research? Does your proposal have focus?
- X Is it a topic worthy of academic study and significance?
- X Do you demonstrate an adequate understanding of the debates in the literature on this topic?
- X Is the project feasible? Do you have a realistic idea of how you are going to tackle the investigation?
- X Is it doable within the time constraints?
- X Does the bibliography and referencing conform to accepted conventions? Is it technically faultless?

For detailed checklist for evaluating thesis proposals, see Appendix E

4 *WHEN AND WHERE ARE RESEARCH PROPOSALS SUBMITTED?*

Different faculties have different requirements, so check with your supervisor or chairperson of the faculty Higher Degrees committee.

If you are doing a Master's by coursework and minithesis:

Once you have completed the coursework part of the degree, usually after the first year, you need to submit a research proposal to your faculty Higher Degrees Committee. Once it has gone through both the faculty and Senate Higher Degrees Committees, your minithesis title will be registered for a period of *three* years. (Note: your title is registered for three years, but you need to register as a Master's student at the beginning of every year.)

Rule A 19.3.2: The title of a thesis/ minithesis is approved for a period of three years, after which the student shall apply to Senate for an extension of time.

If you are doing a Master's by full thesis:

The last day for registration is usually towards the end of March – check the university calendar. You may not register unless your proposal has been accepted.

- * Some departments match you with a potential supervisor with whom you'll work in developing a proposal. Usually departments require that you present your draft proposal to the department before final submission to the faculty Higher Degrees Committee. The committee may refer it back to the student and supervisor for re-working. Once the final proposal has been accepted, you may register.
- * Other departments match you with a potential supervisor with whom you'll work in developing a draft proposal. This draft proposal is submitted to the faculty Higher Degrees committee and is usually accepted as a *provisional* proposal, with the requirement that you submit a *final* proposal by the end of the academic year. This procedure allows you to register for the year while you are working on your final proposal, and enables your assigned supervisor to be accredited formally for the time and effort s/he puts in to help you develop your final proposal. If you do not manage to get a final proposal accepted by the Higher Degrees committee within the allotted time, you will not be allowed to register for the subsequent year.

Once the proposal has gone through both the faculty and Senate Higher Degrees Committees, your thesis title will be registered for a period of *three* years. (Note: your title is registered for three years, but you need to register as a Master's student at the beginning of every year.)

Rule A 19.3.1: The maximum period of study is three years. Extensions may be granted by Senate only in exceptional cases on submission of a motivated application by the student and a recommendation of the head of the department.

If you are doing a Doctorate by full thesis:

The same procedure options apply as for a Master's by full thesis, except that your thesis title is registered for a period of *five* years.

Rule A 23.1: The approval of the relevant head of department has to be obtained before a candidate is allowed to register. The proposed title of the thesis, as well as the promoter and a co-promoter must be approved by the Senate before the end of the first year of registration.

5 **WHAT IS THE FORMAT AND LENGTH OF A RESEARCH PROPOSAL?**

Again, requirements differ from faculty to faculty. Check with your supervisor or the chairperson of the faculty's Higher Degrees committee. Usually, each proposal has the following sections in the following order:

- Cover page
- Abstract (on separate page)
- Title
- 10 key words (or composite words)
- Aims of the research
- Rationale
- Framework of the research / literature review
- Research problem / hypothesis
- Delimitation of study area / assumptions on which the research rests
- Interpretations of key terms
- Research design
- Research methods
- Ethics statement
- Chapter outline
- Time-line
- Budget
- Dissemination of research
- Preliminary bibliography

Sometimes sections are combined. For example, research design and research methods are often combined when the proposed research is entirely literature-based. Sometimes sections are left out. For example, if the research will not involve empirical investigation of people or animals, an ethics statement is usually not necessary. See the sections in the Guide that deal with each specific part.

The length requirement of the proposal also differs from faculty to faculty.

Community Health Sciences:

Master's proposals may not exceed 12 pages (excluding cover page), double spaced typing.

Doctoral proposals may not exceed 20 pages, double spaced.

Education:

Master's proposals may not exceed 5 pages (excluding cover page), single spaced typing.

Doctoral proposals may not exceed 10 pages, single spaced.

Economic and Management Sciences and Arts

No specified length.

Dentistry

A Master's or Doctoral research proposal/ protocol should be about 10 –12 pages all inclusive.

6. HOW DO I DECIDE ON A TOPIC?

The articulation of an appropriate and interesting research topic is perhaps the most demanding and difficult part of your proposal development. So, don't despair if you don't have a clear topic from the start. Getting focus and clarity is part of the proposal writing process. Moreover, the process of developing your proposal is often not a linear one, following logically from step to step. More often than not, it is a process that turns back on itself, surges ahead in leaps, collapses after some more reading, and finally, reaches greater focus. The process is more like a spiral than a straight line. However, that doesn't mean that you should avoid planning the process systematically. As Dr Ernst Conradie of the Department of Religion and Theology,

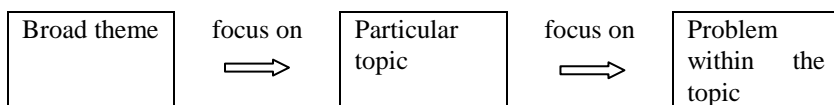
“The process of doing research cannot be explained mechanically in terms of steps or procedures that should be followed rigidly. Research is a creative process. Nevertheless, in this guide the process of doing research is explained on the basis of a number of logical phases. In general, the typical phases of research include the following:

- Choosing a particular research topic;
- Identifying and formulating the specific research problem;
- Conceptualizing the process of investigating this problem;
- Collecting, analyzing and interpreting the relevant data to investigate the problem;
- Writing the final report.”

(Taken from Conradie, E. 2000. *Research methodology 711/811: Writing a research proposal*. Course handout, UWC, p1.)

See the process of developing your research proposal as one of increasing refinement and focus. The first step then is to identify an appropriate and interesting theme, a broad area of study. Ask yourself, why this area interests you,

why it is relevant to investigate, and how this theme has been addressed in the literature. Once you have identified a likely theme, focus on a particular topic in that theme. Ask yourself, what specific issue within that broad theme do you want to investigate? Why do you want to investigate it? Then, once you have identified the topic, focus on a *problem* within that topic.



How do I start?

Think of your thesis as trying to address a problem, a gap in the literature, a puzzle, a muddle, an ambiguity or a tension. Writing about something that is straightforward and unproblematic doesn't constitute an *investigation*. Mere description is not research. But not all problems are viable topics for academic research. Ensure that the problem you choose to investigate is part of an ongoing academic conversation, one that has been addressed in some way or other in the literature. (This is especially important in the case of Master's theses, where you are not required to make an original contribution to the field of knowledge. You are required to demonstrate your familiarity with the academic debates on a particular issue.)

The following may be fruitful places to start looking for an appropriate theme:

- **The coursework** (in the case of a Master's degree by coursework and minithesis). The coursework part addresses issues in your field of study that are relevant, interesting and usually contested (that is why they are chosen for inclusion in the coursework). Think of some of the debates and assignment topics you were engaged in. Are there any ones that you would like to pursue? You might place them in a different context, and look at possible implications thereof. The advantage of choosing a theme from the coursework is that you will have a set of readings to start off with, will have written something on the theme (maybe an assignment that could be adapted for inclusion in the minithesis), and will have engaged in discussion that will have helped sharpen your thinking about it.
- **The literature.** Think of an academic book or journal that you have read. What was the title? What issue did the book or article address? Can you place the issue in a different context? For example, can you place the issue in a different time period, or a different place (like South

Africa), or look at the issue as it pertains to a specific group (like women, or children), or address the issue from a different theoretical perspective (like focusing on power relations within that issue)? Go to the library and browse through the contents pages of journals in your subject area. Look at the kind of issues the articles are addressing. Is there a theme or issue that you want to pursue? Also, ask your supervisor about successful theses that previous students have written. What issues did these theses address? Can you pursue one of them? In that way, the department starts to develop a research *community*, elaborating on previous work and building up an area of expertise. The advantage of choosing a theme from the literature (including previous theses) is that you have a ready reading list at hand – the references listed in the bibliography.

- **An existing research project.** Many supervisors are engaged in existing registered research projects. Joining such a project will give you a solid base and framework (and possibly funding) for your research.
- **Your personal experience.** This is a tricky source from which to choose a topic. It is often a source of great passion and interest, which might help to motivate you. But, ensure that the issue you choose from this source is a viable, academically researchable one.

How do I identify a problem?

Remember, the identified topic within the broader theme must focus on a problem. Your thesis will try to address that problem through a systematic, disciplined discussion, informed by the literature. Not all “problems” are researchable. For example, the government may have a “problem” of not enough money to implement the new policy of low-cost housing. The solution to this “problem” would be simply: more money! But there may be all sorts of other kinds of researchable problems underlying this issue: Should the government cut back on health provision in order to provide housing? What are the tensions around budget constraints? Should housing be the government’s priority? Could provision of housing be privatized? How can low-cost housing promote economic justice? The answers to these kinds of questions are not obvious and are often very contested. These kinds of questions are, therefore, problematic ones.

One of the most significant ways of finding a researchable problem is to READ, READ, READ. There is no short-cut. Your thesis must demonstrate that you are familiar with the academic debates pertaining to the particular issue you have chosen to address. These debates comprise the literature in the field. Furthermore,

it is through engaging with these debates that you identify what the substantive problems are, particularly the problems that are as yet unresolved. Reading about the theme and topic sharpen your thinking and refine your topic. It is worth spending time on formulating a clear, focused research question – it will save you lots of time and frustration later on.

There are different kinds of problems that may become the focus of your thesis:

- **Conceptual** – your thesis may address and evaluate different interpretations of key concepts. Or it may analyze the meaning of a concept, like “human rights”, and investigate its relationship to other concepts. Or it may investigate implications of a concept, like “democracy”, in a particular context, like education.
- **Epistemological or logical** – your thesis may address some problem in thinking. It may analyze the validity of arguments that support a particular position. Or it may investigate some contradictions or paradoxes in thinking, e.g. is self-deception possible? Can one know and not know something at the same time?
- **Exegetical** – your thesis may address a semantic issue. It may involve translations, semantic studies and literary analysis.
- **Social, political or economic** – your thesis may address a problem such as community involvement in decision-making; the role of unions in a free market economy; the implications of HIV/AIDS for family structures. Remember, not all problems you read about in the newspaper or encounter in the work place or your personal life are researchable problems. Look for the underlying interesting questions to ask.
- **Ethical** – your thesis may address what might be the most honourable or appropriate course of action in a particular situation. Or it may investigate what some of our moral stances are, or our views on human flourishing that drive certain policies, e.g. your thesis could ask why we should teach our children to care for the environment. A word of caution: a thesis is a piece of research, not a sermon or ideological tract!
- **Legal, policy** – your thesis might give a clear exposition of what are often very difficult legal tracts, and analyze some of the underlying assumptions. Or it may look at some of the problems of policy implementation. Or it may examine the motivations for particular policies. Or it may examine some of the implications or consequences

(intended and unintended) of a policy.

- **Theoretical** - your thesis might compare and contrast different views of a particular issue. Or it might evaluate the arguments that support or reject a particular position. Or it may examine how a theory needs to be modified if placed in a different context.
- **Historical** – your thesis could examine gaps in historical narratives. Or it may trace the development of a particular issue over time. Or it may trace the different interpretations of a concept like “citizenship” over an historical period.
- **Empirical** – your thesis might try to address the problem of lack of information on a particular issue through doing fieldwork or experiments.

Your thesis might address a combination of these problems. However, remember that a focused problem will give your thesis coherence. Too many different kinds of problems can lead to your losing the thread of your research.

I have identified a topic and a problem within it. What now?

The proposal writing process, as noted earlier, often does not follow a systematic linear development. Again, READ, READ, READ. You might find that the more you read, the more “lost” you become. Don’t despair. It is part of the clarification process. Through your reading, you start to gain focus not only of what to *include*, but also what to *exclude*. So much has been written. You cannot possibly include it all, so you must make informed decisions about what you are *not* going to investigate. Debates are usually not neatly separated into clearly defined fields. You might find that in order to address a particular issue, you need to address something prior to this. But in order to do *that*, you need to tackle another problem that has surfaced, and so on and so on. Where does it stop? It doesn’t. At least, not in a neat end point. *You* have to decide where your starting and end points are within this on-going academic conversation of which you are part. Through reading, you modify your topic, sharpen it more, and give it greater focus.

Once you have clearly articulated your problem question, you need to think about *how* you are going to research it. Read about different ways in which a problem can be investigated. You might find that your problem is “undoable” – it just cannot be researched, either because of a logical difficulty or because of practical reasons. In this case, you’ll have to refine and rework your problem question. For

example, impact studies or examining the “effect of x on y” are notoriously difficult to research because of the complexity of causality, which is hardly ever linear. Or you might find that you cannot get access to particular historical documents central to your thesis, or the people whom you were planning to interview are just too difficult to access. Again, rethink your thesis problem.

Choosing a topic, identifying a problem and conceptualizing the process of investigation are phases that repeat themselves within the spiral development of your proposal. A suggestion: keep a notebook in which you jot down all your ideas and the development of your thinking. It will trace the process that at times to you might seem to be going nowhere, but that, if you look at how your thinking has progressed in the notebook, you might take heart and be reminded of how far down the clarification road you have already come.

7. *WHAT ARE THE PARTS OF THE PROPOSAL?*

There are various ways in which proposals can be structured. Very often there are differences, between scientific disciplines (Maths and Biology), between scientific cultures (natural and social sciences) and types of research (empirical and literature-based studies), which are reflected in the structure of the proposal. Check with your supervisor whether there is a specific structure you need to follow. However, most proposals require the following parts in the order given:

THE COVER PAGE

<p style="text-align: center;">UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN CAPE RESEARCH PROPOSAL</p> <p>Name of candidate:.....</p> <p>Student number:</p> <p>Proposed degree:</p> <p>Programme / Department:</p> <p>Title of thesis:</p> <p>Supervisor:</p> <p>Co-supervisor (if any):</p> <p>Date:</p>

ABSTRACT

In no more than 500 words, say what your central problem question is, why it is a problem worthy of study, and how you will go about studying it. Your abstract should be brief, clear and informative, giving a clear indication of what is intended and why.

In addition to your full proposal, students will need to prepare a **one-page summary** of the proposal. The full proposal and one page summary must be submitted to the faculty Higher Degrees committee and the one page summary will be forwarded to the Senate Higher Degrees committee. The one-page summary must include:

- Student name, number, degree for which registered, department in which registered.
- Thesis title
- Abstract of 500 words
- 10 key terms

TITLE

The title should convey clearly and succinctly the topic being researched. The title should be brief and provide a good idea about the focus of the thesis. Avoid obscure and unnecessarily lengthy titles.

KEY WORDS

Provide 10 key words or composite words which convey what the thesis is about. The key words should be in a particular sequence: the first should give a broad indication of the field of the research, the second should give a more specific indication, the third should be even more specific, and so on. Some programmes insist on individual key *words*, others allow *composite words*. Check with your supervisor.

Take care when putting your key words together - these will be entered into a Library catalogue and made available to a world-wide research community. Your key words should reflect, in a kind of telegram style, the main areas or concepts of your thesis, so that someone who reads them can get a fairly clear idea of the focus of your thesis and development of your discussion.

THE AIM/S OF THE RESEARCH

You must draw a clear distinction between:

- X An **academic** aim, which is the issue / problem your thesis hopes to address on the basis of developments in the academic literature and aimed at an academic audience. Your thesis *must* have an academic aim as its central aim.
- X and a **strategic** aim, which *might* follow from your thesis and which is aimed at a non-academic audience, e.g. policy makers in land distribution issues, recommendations to health workers in community development projects, etc. (It is inappropriate for your thesis to have a strategic aim as its central aim.)

In order to formulate your aims, it may be useful to start off by clarifying:

- X the theme (the broad topic)
- X the topic (an aspect of that theme) and
- X the specific focus on an issue within that topic (what kind of problem is it?).

This should form the basis for a clear statement of the aim/s of the research that you propose to undertake.

Formulate the **academic aims** so that they capture an academic undertaking. Consider starting your aim/s with words like: explore, investigate, analyze, determine, interpret, understand, demarcate, critique, ascertain, compare, contrast, evaluate, assess.

The **strategic aim/s** might start with something like: improve practice in ..., inform policy in ..., but remember, you are writing for an *academic* audience and the main aim/s of your thesis should therefore be academic.

This section, then, should convey clearly what you want to achieve through your research, that is, what the destination of your research activities is. Note that there needs to be a tight coherence between the **Title**, **Key Words** and the **Aim/s** of the research.

RATIONALE / BACKGROUND

In this section you need to explain:

- X The **context** that gives rise to your research project. What conditions have led you to propose your research project and to define your aim/s in the way that you have done? (You may be aware of certain events, processes and debates and be of the view that certain issues require systematic and focused research. You may be of the view that our current knowledge of certain issues is inadequate or that certain issues have been poorly researched. You may be in disagreement with the interpretation advanced by a certain scholar and/or the methodology s/he used, etc.).
- X Your **motivation** for the research project. What is your interest in the research project? What motivates you to do the project? Why is it worthy of academic investigation?
- X The **importance** of the proposed research. What do you consider to be the significance of the research project? What contribution will the research project make in terms of current knowledge around the issue or problem that is being researched?

The function of this section is to indicate the general importance of the field and to start giving an indication of the nature of present understanding in the field.

THE LITERATURE REVIEW / FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

In this section you need to make explicit and clear the central issues that will structure (shape and organize) the research. The framework is vital for guiding the research, for ensuring coherence and for establishing the boundaries of the project. In this section you need to demonstrate that you have some sense of the debates in literature around the topic. Mere appeal to your own experiences or general knowledge is inadequate. The literature review is crucial to formulating the framework of the research. For your research proposal, the literature review should draw on a limited number of sources. The thesis itself will expand on the literature.

In this section you will therefore need to indicate:

- X What is the **context** within which your research project is located? What does the literature reflect about the development of the issue? In what context (historical, geographical, social) is most of the literature located? What is the history of your area of study? What are the most recent findings in your area of study? What gaps and contradictions exist

among these findings? What new research questions do these findings suggest? Consult a few introductory texts, some standard articles, and chapters in standard works or in topical encyclopedias in order to sketch an orientation of the kinds of academic debates in the field.

- X In what **conceptual framework** will you be developing your discussion? That is to say, what is the starting point or point of departure of your research in relation to the literature in the field? What are some of the assumptions you are going to start from? How will you be interpreting some of the key concepts? In terms of what are you going to be analyzing or investigating the particular focus of your thesis?). Is there a gap in the previous literature? Have you identified an inadequacy in the existing body of literature? In relation to current knowledge (as reflected in the literature), what do you intend to do? What theoretical model relates to your research topic? Consult some of the major texts and some recent articles to demonstrate that you have a clear sense of the major positions and trends in the field of study.
- X What **methodological** frameworks will you be using? What methods and results have previous researchers in your field produced? What different methodologies have been used by other researchers in your area? What are the key methodological issues that have been addressed?

Note that your aim/s of the research state the destination of your research activities, whereas the framework is the vehicle in which you will be driving towards your destination. The purpose of the literature review section is to establish the conceptual framework for the study, to indicate where the study fits into the broader debates (where, in the on-going conversation, does it fit?), and so, to justify the value or significance of your research project against the backdrop of previous research.

See Appendix C for examples of a bad and of a better review.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM/ RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

This part captures the essential focus of your thesis and it is therefore important that you spend time on formulating a clear, focused and interesting problem that is researchable. This problem is the engine of your thesis – it drives the various sections, directs your discussion towards the destination you want to get to, and informs the way in which you will develop your thesis.

Your central research problem must be:

- **One main** problem, stated in a single sentence or question. If you can't do this, it is indication that you don't as yet have enough focus. You need to demarcate your problem more. I think that formulating your problem in the form of a **problem question** is very fruitful for giving your writing and reading direction – it impels you to **answer** the question. It also assists with coherence of the thesis, in that each chapter contributes to the overall answer to the question.
- The question must indeed be a **problem**. It should focus on, for example, a gap in the debates, a puzzle, a muddle, an ambiguity, a tension, or a paradox. You should be able to explain why it is a problem and why it is worthy of study. If the answer to the question is already known, or straightforward, or one on which there is scholarly consensus, then the question is not worth pursuing.

Your research question must be tightly related to your *research aim/s* and must also emerge from your *research framework*.

Pay attention to the **kind** of problem question you pose. Some questions may be of an *empirical* kind in that they seek to obtain information and data that are *descriptive* in nature. Other questions may be of an *analytical* kind; that is, they steer you towards *explaining* a phenomenon. (Questions can start with “can?”, “should?”, “is?”, “how?”, “what?”, “why?” etc. Each of these will have a different focus, so make sure that you formulate a question which coheres with the aims and title of your research project.)

Here is an example taken from: National Research Foundation, 2000. *Workbook for first time and inexperienced researchers*. Pretoria, pp11-12.

“We start with the idea for a research question ...

‘How have South African mining regulations changed, and what has been the impact of these changes?’

But this is a huge area! We need to determine some appropriate boundaries in order to make the project manageable.

The broad question needs to be restated more precisely so as to indicate both the purpose of the project and the direction that the research will take. Here it is helpful to define the key terms and concepts that must be investigated, and

possibly determine a specific period that the study will cover.

We might do the following:

- To define safety regulations for purposes of this study as ‘any Act of the South African parliament which specifically regulates safety on mines within South Africa’, so that the project can exclude any regulations imposed by mining companies, mining boards, or particular mine managements.
- To restrict the study to *gold* mining, and to the effect of mining *safety* regulations. After all, there is such a range of different types of mining legislation that the study can’t cover them all.
- To restrict the period of time covered by the study. A good starting point would be the Mines and Works Act No. 12 of 1911. Why? Because it was the first piece of legislation passed after the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 that controlled general conditions of work on the mines. There could be a number of end-points to the study. One could be the Mine Health and Safety Act No. 29 of 1996, which was passed following a Commission of Enquiry into a number of serious accidents in gold and coal mines.

Now we know what type of regulations we are investigating, within which region and sector, and over what time period. Changes in these regulations may have affected many things, however, and we still need to narrow down the areas of impact which the study will consider. Consequences for mining safety? Consequences for staff morale? Consequences for the price of gold? For purposes of this study we might decide the following:

- To look at the consequences for the *cost of gold production*.

In other words, the study will not be concerned with regulations in existence prior to 1911, or to the coal, diamond, or other mining industries, or to changes in management structure, worker morale, or any other aspects in the mining industry beyond the consequences of the legislation for the cost of production.

The research question can now be reformulated as follows:

‘What consequences did Acts of Parliament regulating mine safety between 1911 and 1996 have for the cost of gold production in South Africa?’

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Research hypotheses are statements of some of the different and possible solutions to the problem question. Some research proposals, especially those planning to

undertake experimental work, or planning to do survey studies and empirical studies, need a research hypothesis. You will need to articulate *in proposition (statement) form what you expect to find*. Your expectation needs to be based on existing theories, borrowed from other empirical studies or based on logical deduction. Your thesis will aim to verify or falsify the hypothesis within the theoretical framework of the research project.

A good hypothesis has several basic characteristics:

- It should be reasonable.
- It should be consistent with available facts and theory, i.e. it must be consistent with results established from previous research;
- It should be testable. You should be able to prove that it is correct or incorrect.
- It should be stated as simply as possible.

DELIMITATION OF STUDY AREA / ASSUMPTIONS ON WHICH THE RESEARCH PROJECT RESTS

It is important that you state clearly the research assumptions that you will base your research problem/ hypotheses on. This helps immensely in preventing you from the vague generalizations that so often accompany the lack of proper research planning. A minithesis, in particular, must have very clearly defined limits. You cannot tackle everything. Rather than trying to do too much in a superficial way, focus on a small area which you aim to investigate in depth. All research projects must have a starting point and an end point. That necessarily means that you have to set clear boundaries. This will serve to orientate your reader and to make your study a manageable one.

To delimit your study area requires careful analytical thinking. You are going to highlight certain aspects that are embedded in a seamless web of issues. To do this, you need to break the whole into its constituent parts, and to examine the various elements that make up the whole. Analytical thinking is a sophisticated academic skill that takes practice and systematic untangling. Analysis looks at the various parts, without losing sight of the links between the parts. This is a skill. Your proposal needs to demonstrate that you have been able to demarcate or delimit your area of study.

Ways in which you can do this:

- State what interpretation of the key concepts you are going to be working with (a kind of “working definition”). If, for example, your

thesis will examine freedom of the press in reporting on murder statistics in the last 5 years, you might want to state that you will be working with a liberal notion of negative freedom, i.e. non-interference by government. Of course, your thesis might have as its aim to examine contesting interpretations. In that case, you delimit your study area to the different interpretations as advanced in the literature.

- State what the starting claims of your thesis are. You don't have to re-invent the wheel, but can take certain claims as the basis from which your thesis will proceed. For example, you may want to investigate the economic costs of treating HIV/AIDS pregnant mothers. You might state that your thesis will not engage with the debates about the causes of AIDS, but will assume that HIV positive mothers are potential AIDS victims.
- Narrow your field of study. Most proposals suffer from being too ambitious and trying to cover too wide an area. It is through reading that you start focusing on particular aspects. Narrow down the study by limiting it to a particular group (e.g. women, or mothers, or single mothers, or single mothers with no employment), to a particular time (e.g., post-1994 South Africa), or a particular region (e.g. the Western Cape, the Cape Flats), or a particular kind of enterprise or occupation (e.g. spaza shop owners, care-givers), or a particular function (e.g. generating staff morale as a function of HR; or instead of 'media' focus on radio). Ask yourself: Who, when, where, what, how, why? With each of the answers, you might be able to define your field of study more and more.

RESEARCH DESIGN / RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The function of this section is to give your reader a clear indication of the means by which you hope to achieve your research aims, to outline a procedure which, if necessary, can be repeated by others, and to indicate the sources of data that will be used. The research design needs to go into some detail about the methods and procedures to be used. In other words, you must say *how* you are going to investigate what it is your thesis will focus on.

This will vary according to the nature of your field of study. A proposal for a traditional experiment will require detailed specification of the design, the variables, and the measures that are going to be used. A proposal for a purely literature-based study will have to specify what kind of sources you are going to

consult and how you are going to engage with them. For example, are you going to do conceptual analysis, undertake literary study, construct an historical narrative, or develop an argument based on discourse analysis? A proposal for an empirical study will have to give details about the methods, to justify your choice of methods, and to give details about the where, when, and who that your methods will involve. For example, if you are going to interview people, say what the purpose of your interview is, the structure of it, as well as who, when and where you are going to interview.

There are styles of research such as ethnographic, interpretive, “case studies”, in which there is a principled resistance to pre-specifying the details of the research. The design of the research is seen as *emerging* during the investigation. Proposals for this kind of research must demonstrate that you have both the need for, and the right to, this kind of flexibility. The proposal must justify why the research questions are best dealt with in this way. You must also demonstrate, through argument and referencing, that you are competent to carry out this kind of research and capable of using the proposed methods. (See Robson, C. 1994. *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner researchers*. Oxford: Blackwell. 2nd edition.)

In this section you need to tell your reader about:

- X Your information and data **sources**. (*Where you will get your information and data from for your empirical research? If you are doing conceptual research, e.g. a literature study, policy analysis, developing a historical narrative, or conceptual analysis, note which sources of literature you are aiming to draw on*).).
- X The **methods** and **techniques** you will use for obtaining information and data. (*How you will obtain the information and data? Will you use documentary, and/or qualitative and/or quantitative methods? If you will use quantitative methods, which technique/s will you use - survey or questionnaire, etc? If you are intending to use a qualitative method, which technique/s will you use - structured interview, semi-structured interview, open-ended interview, participant observation, etc?*)
- X Your **justification** for your choice of method/s and technique/s. (*Why you will use, from the range of available methods / techniques, the particular methods / techniques you propose? Is the method and technique appropriate for your research aims and questions?*)
- X Where appropriate, how you intend to **verify** the reliability of the

information and data you collect.

- X Whether you are confronted by any **ethical issues** and how you propose to address these. (*See next section on ethics statement*)
- X The **feasibility** of your proposed project. (What arrangements have you made to obtain information and data? That is, will you have *access* to your information /data sources? Do you have the skills to use certain techniques and to analyze the data you will gather? If not, how will you learn these? Do you have the resources - equipment, funds etc. - that will be required?)
- X The plan for **data analysis**. (In terms of what criteria are you going to analyze your findings? What methods are you going to use for analysis? Don't merely say, for example, that you are going to use SPSS – say *why* this would be appropriate to use. Make sure that you don't give the impression that you are going to gather the data and then think about the analysis afterwards!)

Bear in mind, that if you are writing a *minithesis*, it is a rigorous, systematic but *modest* piece of work. For Master's minitheses and Master's full theses you are not expected to formulate some *new* insights or develop some original knowledge. (This is a requirement only for Doctoral theses.)

Avoid being too ambitious in the number of methods you intend to use or the number of interviews/ observations/ experiments you are planning to undertake.

Your research design must cohere with your **aims, research question/ hypothesis** and **research framework**. (What design is most *appropriate* for the research questions you aim to address?)

See Appendix D for Research Sources
See also <http://www.nrf.ac.za/methods/reviews.htm>

ETHICS STATEMENT

If your research will involve people and /or animals as research subjects, you have to include an ethics statement in your proposal. Such a statement is an indication of your awareness of the ethical considerations and an agreement to conduct your fieldwork in accordance with ethical procedures.

Check with your supervisor about the ethical and professional guidelines for research in your particular study area. Also, check the Web for research ethics pertaining to your discipline. The yellow *Supervision Guide* also lists various texts and sites you can consult (pp22-23).

In short,

- You will ensure that you have the appropriate training and preparation for conducting the research.
- You will ensure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects and welfare of the animals you will work with are protected.
- You will protect the identities and interests of those involved.
- You guarantee the confidentiality of the information given to you.
- You will conduct your research in accordance with the ethical and professional guidelines as specified in your disciplinary association.

See also the yellow Supervision Guide, pp 22-23.

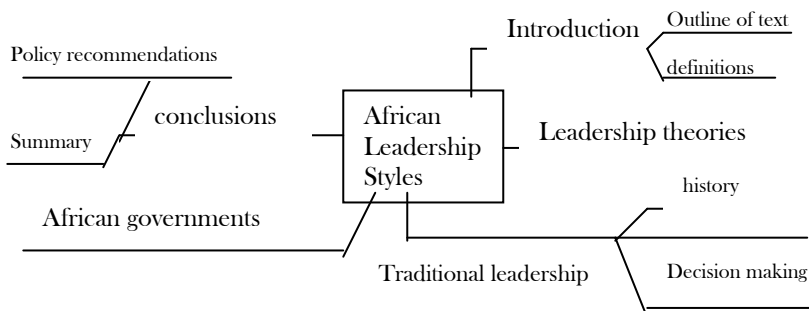
CHAPTER OUTLINE

If the main research question is the heart of your research proposal, the chapter outline is the skeleton. It gives your reader an indication of how the various elements of your study fit together and the logical development of your investigation. The way in which you structure your chapters depends on the kind of study you wish to undertake. Here are two examples, one for studies based entirely on literature, and one for studies involving empirical work:

Literature-based studies

In a literature-based study, each chapter addresses a particular aspect of the main research question. In order to formulate these aspects, go back to your title, key words, aims and main research question. Using a mind-map or spider diagram, write the main research question in a box in the middle of the page. Draw a “leg” from this box to the top right side of the page, where you write an aspect that you will need to deal with in your thesis. Add more sub-legs, if necessary. Then, in clockwise fashion, draw another leg from the main box, with another important aspect that needs to be addressed. You may have to draw your spider diagram several times until you find a sequence and selection of aspects that works for your proposal.

Here is a simple example taken from the National Research Foundation, 2000. *Writing your research proposal: a workbook for first time and inexperienced researchers*. Pretoria, p43.



Here each leg off the main box will be a chapter. Within the chapter will be various sub-headings as indicated in the smaller legs. The diagram is a way of helping you identify key aspects and structure the development of your thesis. For the proposal, write down the heading of each chapter (and some of the sub-headings within that chapter). There is no set number of chapters you need to have. However, bear in mind the content length of your thesis:

A Research Report (usually in Law or SoG): 5 000 – 10 000 words.

A Master's minithesis: 7 000 – 20 000 words.

Master's full thesis: 20 000 – 45 000 words.

Another way of generating a chapter outline is to consider the key words, aims and main research question. On a large sheet of paper, jot down as many sub-questions as you can think of – the kind of questions that somewhere in your thesis you will have to address in order to contribute to the overall response to your main problem question. Once you've done this, *group* questions that address the same issue, or that are logically linked. After you've done this, *sequence* the various groups of questions. Make sure that there is a logical development so that question 2 follows question 1, etc. If you have about 10 of these questions, approach each one as you would approach an assignment. List the various sources you will draw on in order to help you answer the question. If you write an informed 10-15 page "assignment" to each one of the listed (say, 10) questions, you will have your thesis!

You need to think long and hard about your research questions. Don't be shy to list questions which to you may be obvious. By putting them on paper you make them explicit and provide yourself with a checklist of the information and data

that will be required to realize your research aim. Think of the research questions as the fuel and the motor that propel you towards your destination (research aim).

Here's an example:

Main research question: **What are the moral justifications for Environmental Education (EE)?**

1. What is the structure of moral arguments?

- * Why are moral frameworks necessary?
- * How do moral frameworks inform self-understanding and practices?
- * Is Practical reasoning a form of moral argument?

2. What are the current conceptual maps of EE?

- * What are the maps based on social theory?
- * What are the maps based on moral theory?

3. What constitutes a rationalist approach to EE?

- * What are its historical roots?
- * How does disengaged reason shape self-understanding and practices?
- * What is the justification for a rationalist approach to EE?

4. What are the problems associated with a rationalist approach?

5. What constitutes a sentient approach to EE?

- * How did it develop out of a critique of the rationalist approach?
- * How does the belief in the goodness of nature shape self-understanding and practices?
- * What is the justification for a sentient approach to EE?
- * How does a sentient approach claim to provide a better account of EE than a rationalist approach?

6. What are the problems associated with a sentient approach?

7. What is a co-operative approach to EE?

- * How did it develop out of a critique of a sentient approach?
- * How does social justice shape self-understandings and practices?
- * How does a co-operative account claim to provide a better account than a sentient and rationalist approach?

8. What are some of the problems associated with a co-operative approach?

9. Can the notions of attunement and practical wisdom improve a co-operative approach to EE?

There are certain standard formats of thesis chapter outlines (see the *Thesis Guide*, pp7-10), but these are by no means mandatory. Although research needs to follow certain accepted conventions, it is also a creative process.

Studies that embark on empirical research

Usually studies of this kind follow a format that consists of:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework/ literature review

Chapter 3: Research design and methodology

Chapter 4: Research findings and analysis

Chapter 5: Conclusion and recommendations.

See the orange Thesis Guide, pp7-10, as well as Appendix V (in the Thesis Guide) for the contents page with its chapter outline.

TIME-LINE

Here you need to outline a work schedule which couples the various research activities you will be involved in with a time-frame. It is important that you present a realistic time-frame which allocates sufficient time for the various activities and also for revising, editing and producing the final text.

BUDGET

If you will be submitting your proposal to funders, like the NRF or MRC, you must include a budget. List what equipment you need (computer, tape-recorder, scientific equipment, etc) as well as the kind of services you will have to pay for (transcription, photocopying, binding, postage, library loans, etc). Different funding bodies each have their own interpretations of what is permissible and fundable, and you will obviously have to adapt your proposal accordingly.

There is a general tendency to underestimate costs (and time), especially when money is scarce. Be as realistic as you can. Unforeseen circumstances will inevitably increase your costs and take more of your time than you have budgeted for.

DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH

Some proposals have a section called "Dissemination of research". Check with your supervisor or the chairperson of the faculty Higher Degrees committee whether you need to include this. It is usually not necessary for a research project or a Master's minithesis.

Address the following questions in this section:

- What will you do with the results of the research once the project is completed?
- How will you make it available to those who may benefit from the research?
- Do you plan to publish extracts from the research in accredited journals?
Or in popular journals?

Avoid making grandiose claims about your publication and dissemination plans.
(Taken from Conradie, E. 2000. *Research methodology 71/811. Writing a research proposal*. Course handout, UWC, p12.)

PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY

List all the texts that you have referred to in your proposal, as well as others that you have consulted thus far. The bibliography need not be extensive at this stage, but it should provide an indication of the texts that are important and relevant for your project.

You must ensure that your bibliography is technically faultless. Check every entry carefully. Proposals with faulty bibliographies are sent back by the committee. The committee judges that if you cannot manage to do a bibliography correctly (after all, this is a simple technical exercise), then you will not be able to manage the more sophisticated academic skills needed for research!

APPENDIX A

WHAT THE RESEARCH PROJECT IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

A. WHAT THE RESEARCH PROJECT IS

1. In terms of **CONCEPTION**

- 1.1 At Master's level – a small and modest research project, feasible and doable.
- 1.2 A research project informed by a clear research proposal
- 1.3 A research project which, like all good research projects, has a clear and definite focus.
- 1.4 A research project which poses a research problem or question and tries to answer it.
- 1.5 In addressing the question, it presents and sustains a coherent and informed argument.

2. In terms of **PROCESS**

- 2.1 A systematic investigation using appropriate research methods and techniques.

3. In terms of **LEARNING**

- 3.1 At Master's level – a first opportunity to practise being a researcher.
- 3.2 At Master's level – the beginning of an internship in the craft of research.
- 3.3 An indicator of familiarity with the area of research focus.
- 3.4 An indicator of competence regarding the research methods and techniques utilized.

4. In terms of **PRODUCT**

- 4.1 A coherent and well-organized text of required length.
- 4.2 A well-written and well-edited text.
- 4.3 A proofread texts (no typing or minor errors).
- 4.4 A coherent, appropriate and faultless bibliography and demonstrated familiarity with academic conventions.
- 4.5 A text for the supervisor and examiners.

5. In terms of **EXAMINATION**

- 5.1 At Master's level – examined by 3 examiners.
At Doctoral level – examined by 4 examiners.
- 5.2 Examined according to criteria set by the academic community of the

university.

- 5.3 Examiners report directly to the Exams Office. Reports are tabled at the faculty Higher Degrees committee and then forwarded to the Senate Higher Degrees committee.

B. WHAT THE RESEARCH PROJECT IS *NOT*

1. In terms of CONCEPTION
 - 1.1 Simply a description of something
 2. In terms of LEARNING
 - 2.1 At Master's level – it need not make an original contribution to the body of knowledge in the subject area.
 3. In terms of PROCESS
 - 3.1 An ad-hoc, haphazard, sloppy exercise of collecting facts and information around an unfocussed topic.
 4. In terms of PRODUCT
 - 4.1 A rave about something that angers or hassles you.
 - 4.2 A text addressed to policy-makers.
 - 4.3 A text addressed to practitioners.
 - 4.4 An extended uncritical political pamphlet.
 5. In terms of EXAMINATION
 - 5.1 An assessment of your personal circumstances – the *product* is examined.
-

APPENDIX B

EXAMPLE OF A POOR PROPOSAL WITH SUPERVISOR'S COMMENTS

(Taken from: Welman, J.C. and Kruger, S.J. 1999. *Research Methodology for the business and Administrative Sciences*. Johannesburg: Thomson Publishers.) Note that the proposal has different sections and wording to those in the Guide. This is an illustration of how proposals differ from discipline to discipline.

GENERAL CONTENTS

Dear student

Your research proposal is, in general, well structured. You have obviously considered the structural elements in the development of a research proposal. In addition, there is definitely a need for this study, and you deserve recognition for having identified the importance of considering trade union perceptions of affirmative action. However, due to serious shortcomings with regard to methodology and content, you will have to do some more work and then resubmit this proposal. The following general comments are therefore pertinent:

- Your proposal (draft) is based on an over dependence on secondary sources. You should do further reading on studies by leading South African corporate and academic South African experts such as L. Human, M. van Wyk, K. Hofmeyr, E. Charoux and P. Madi. In addition, you should consult scientific journals such as the *Industrial Relations Journal of South Africa* and the *SA Journal of Labour Relations* in order to enhance the scientific value of your proposal and, Ultimately, your master's manuscript itself.
- You make no reference to the Employment Equity Bill. You should study this Bill in detail and identify its impact on the field of study.
- Furthermore, you should attempt to obtain policy documents and position papers on affirmative action published by trade unions and union federations. You should also read the union views in the *SA Labour Bulletin*. See also Patel (in Innes, 1993) in your present list of sources (references).
- You should specify the limitations of the study and indicate how these limitations will be addressed.
- The conceptual framework of your research is not well developed. Your proposal raises many questions that need further clarification. The how, what, why, where, when and who need to be addressed during the planning phase of this study in order to prevent problems during the research process.
- The discrepancy between the current title and the content of your research proposal is highly problematic. You could either change the title or amend the content of the proposal in order to ensure congruency.
- You should correct the spelling and grammatical errors.

	SPECIFIC COMMENTS FROM THE SUPERVISOR
<p>1. TITLE</p> <p>Here is a suggested title which may be suitable for the topic to be studied:</p> <p>‘Perceptions on Trade Union involvement on Affirmative Action Programmes’</p>	
<p>2. INTRODUCTIONS</p> <p>Affirmative Action began in America in the early 1950’s as a basis for formal equality in education, employment and welfare. However, this was not a guarantee for equal treatment because it could not eradicate inequalities deriving from economic, cultural and environmental factors. In Australia, representation can be achieved by a legally registered union.</p> <p>In colonial Africa, it is noted that whenever Africans took over higher posts without the necessary experience and qualifications, productivity would be very poor as has been the case in Ghana, Angola and Guinea. In the Sub- Sahara, Zimbabwe has never precisely formulated or implemented Affirmative Action.</p> <p>In the South African context various factors affecting success and failures of Affirmative Action as a reactive process to address discrimination in job need to be analysed and this is the basis for the research.</p>	<p>Your fleeting reference to a few isolated countries is neither correct nor complete. Although not a legal requirement, affirmative action (AA) has been, and still is being, practised by large companies in Zimbabwe. See Gatherer & Erickson (in Innes, 1993) which you consulted according to your list of sources (references).</p> <p>What are the various factors you referred to?</p>
<p>3. MOTIVATION FOR THE INVESTIGATION</p> <p>Affirmative Action is an issue that continues to arouse interest and demand attention and deliberations in the content of a changing South Africa. To date, much has been debated and written on the issue, particularly on the philosophy of the policy and the implementation.</p> <p>However, these arguments and deliberations have focussed primarily on the need to address imbalances emanating from the apartheid era, as Griffin (1990:25) contents. Ironically, the South African society is engaged in multiparty democracy with diversified political persuasions. It is this dichotomy that arouses interest in the project since their viewpoints on affirmative action differ significantly.</p>	<p>The purpose of this paragraph is not clear. It does not form part of the motivation for the research.</p>

<p>The practical and fundamental importance of the study, therefore, is to attempt to evaluate whether or not external consultancy has a bearing on the quality of people employed and resultant production. The assumption is made that rationalization necessitates union involvement as a result of the Government's open-door policy.</p>	<p>It is not clear why external consultancy is considered important.</p> <p>Why does rationalization necessitate union involvement?</p>
<p>4. AIMS OF THE RESEARCH</p> <p>Whilst affirmative action is a major focus in the 1990's, Innes (1993:1) sees it as a priority which will pave the way for a truly democratic society. The main aim of the investigation is to establish perception concerning the role of trade unions on affirmative action.</p>	<p>There is no link between these two sentences. In addition, why do you want to establish perception concerning the role of trade unions on affirmative action? What is the significance of this? How can organizations benefit from the research?</p>
<p>This aim may be supported by secondary aims in an attempt to explain why people join unions.</p> <p>These objectives may be considered as indirect methods of maintaining the welfare of union members.</p> <p>At the end of the research, it will be clear to everybody that on a macro level, addressing the imbalances of the past is the ideal objective, but such efforts should not be executed in a dogmatic manner without taking cognizance of the practical implications.</p>	<p>The secondary aim must also relate to the research.</p> <p>This statement does not make sense.</p> <p>Phrases such as '... it will be clear to everybody ...' are too sweeping. Yes, it is important to consider the practical implications. At this stage, can you identify some of these?</p>
<p>5. THEORETICAL GROUNDING OF THE INVESTIGATION</p> <p>Theoretical grounding of the investigation should emphasise the following themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An explanation of the concept affirmative action as well as its operation. Affirmative action is best described by Rosenfeld (1991:42) as an attempt to bring members of under represented groups, that have suffered discrimination into a higher degree of participation in some beneficial programme. - Beneficiaries: This is a controversial issue as beneficiaries are described in political and racial overtones. - Moral, political and constitutional arguments for and against affirmative action. 	<p>Consider South African definitions of affirmative action, especially by the Department of Labour. Rosenfeld's definition is not the best one. The phrase '...some beneficial program.' Is vague. Give your own interpretation of the term after you have provided a formal definition.</p> <p>In addition, your theoretical basis for terms such as 'beneficiaries' is not clear .Be specific. Who are the beneficiaries? Please read the Employment Equity Bill. What is the relevance of moral, political and constitutional arguments for and against</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An explanation of the concept Trade Union. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Section 25 of the New Labour Relations Act (LRA) 66 of 1995 provides for workers representation in the workplace. - Why workers join trade unions (Finnemore & Van der Merwe 1992:95-97) 	<p>affirmative action? The fact that affirmative action will need to be compatible with the Constitution and the above-mentioned Bill makes some of these issues somewhat irrelevant. Also, the concept trade union is not explained. Yes, the Labour Relations Act (LRA) makes provision for worker representation in the workplace, but you should indicate the relevance of this for your study.</p> <p>Why workers join trade unions-relevance?</p>
<p>6. AN OVERVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES</p> <p>There is not enough literature to address issues related to affirmative action.</p> <p>Available literature with regard to this current issue can be categorized as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studies which are generally well executed: Some written within an American context are generally well executed. In the American context, affirmative action was aimed mainly at blacks (Qunta, 1995:29). Nevertheless, there are some American indicators for the South African situation. For example, the book by Conrad P.J. and Maddur R.B .sets a comprehensive and practical guidelines about equal employment and affirmative action which may well be executed in South Africa. • The second category are those studies with some shortcomings which invalidate findings: Some books written within the South African context are marred by shortcomings. For instance, Maphai seems to be biased against other racial groups in dealing with beneficiaries for affirmative action whilst Hugo favours the whites. It is therefore, a matter of black and white syndrome. Test samples are taken from their respective communities and they rely on their empirical observation and subjective interpretation of important issues. Books written 	<p>This statement is incorrect. There is a vast amount of literature available on issues related to affirmative action. According to the Human Sciences Research Council, more that 100 theses are being written on affirmative action.</p> <p>Your discussion of available literature is inadequate. You are not required to do book reviews. Rather, take the most relevant literature and indicate how your study will build on it. In addition, when criticizing other studies, make sure that your criticism is valid, objective and well substantiated from a scientific perspective.</p> <p>Klug's statement bears no relevance to your topic.</p>

<p>under these circumstances cannot depict a clear and objective picture of employment problems in South Africa.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas where little or no systematic knowledge exists: Klug (1993:25) is of the opinion that all along the National Party (NP) has been practicing affirmative action. • Well conducted studies: Christine Qunta's book, Who is Afraid of Affirmative Action is unique. While most of the provision for worker representation in the workplace, but you should indicate the relevance of this for your study. 	<p>Your review of Qunta's book does not relate to the topic of your research either. Yes, the author does focus on the role of the black professional, but how will you integrate this with the perceptions of trade unions?</p>
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<p>7. STATEMENT PROBLEM AND ITS PRACTICAL RELEVANCE</p> <p>The research problem can be formulated as follows: 'To what extent will trade unions have an effect on affirmative action programmes?'</p> <p>This problem may be elucidated by the following hypotheses:</p> <p>H_O There is no significant difference in the perceptions of government-, trade union and academic respondents that trade unions must be involved in affirmative action programmes.</p> <p>H_A There is significant difference in the perceptions of government-, trade union and academic respondents that trade unions must be involved in affirmative action programmes.</p> <p>Rationale: Affirmative action will pave the way for racial integration. This means that the traditional rule that certain jobs are reserved for Whites will disappear. Unions will no longer be aggressive towards the management.</p> <p>Problems facing civil service center around the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological and symbolic level (Hugo & Scheire, 1990:133). The September Commission of Cosatu in Kempton Park exposed deep rooted mistrust between the government and COSATU (Adler, 1997:38). • The economic role of civil service (Walton & Handy, 1997:210) 	<p>The problem statement is not well formulated. Check your grammar as well. Elaborate more on the problem in a paragraph or two prior to formulating your hypotheses.</p> <p>Your rationale does not relate to the hypothesis. The hypotheses must flow logically from the theoretical rationale and review of the literature.</p> <p>What is the relevance of the mistrust between the government and COSATU? Please explain.</p> <p>What do you mean when you state that the civil service is strongly partisan and should represent a major political power block? The emphasis you place on the civil service</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On political level, civil service should represent a major political power block. 	<p>gives the expression that you intend to focus your study on the civil service, but this not explicitly mentioned anywhere in your proposal.</p>
<p>8. THE INVESTIGATION</p> <p>The investigation will be carried out, very broadly in the following way:</p> <p>8.1 Method</p> <p>According to Huysamen (1993:26) the survey method is generally used when the researcher wishes to elicit opinions. Since the objective of the researcher will be to measure perceptions concerning the impacts of trade union on affirmative action, the survey method is deemed to be most appropriate. It will also be practically impossible to exercise control over the variables. As a sensitive project, participants will be able to voice their opinions without being recognized.</p>	
<p>8.2 Test Samples</p> <p>The target population for this research will be the top management in the Government service, Trade unionists and the academics. This will be done by approaching informants in a simple random sample. The number required for the whole exercise will be one hundred and fifty (150). The said procedure will be conducted irrespective of age distribution, level of education, socio-economic status, gender or creed. Data collected will be used to test the hypothesis.</p> <p>8.3 Measuring Instruments</p> <p>It is important that measuring instruments used should ensure some measure of reliability and validity. Most appropriate measuring instruments are survey questionnaires. According to Huysamen (1993, p. 128) these are used to obtain information from respondents about biographical particulars (age, educational qualification, etcetera) typical behaviour (what they favour) opinions and attitudes. Structured and unstructured questionnaires and these will conform to the Likert Scale.</p>	<p>Why are academics to be included, which academics are going to be included, and from which institutions or departments? Which trade unions will be used? What problems do you foresee? Will all groups complete the same questionnaire, and if so, how many questionnaires for each group? Have you considered alternative data collection methods sampling procedures?</p> <p>More information is needed on your questionnaire. What do you plan to include in the questionnaire? How and where will the questionnaires be administered and distributed? How will reliability and validity be ensured? Why have you referred to structured and unstructured questionnaires? How will</p>

<p>8.4 Statistical Analysis</p> <p>An appropriate statistical technique is the t-test. Illustrations in the form of diagrams will be demonstrated.</p>	<p>the Likert scale be used?</p> <p>Why is the t-test appropriate, and how and where will this analysis be done?</p>
<p>9. EXPECTED RESULTS</p> <p>It is expected trade unionists will favour dominating role in affirmative action involvement whereas the majority of top management in the public service will favour no role of trade unionists because of frequent conflicts with the government policies. The academics will not favour any trade union involvement. In fact, affirmative action should pave the way for equal opportunities.</p>	<p>How do these statements relate to your hypotheses? What is your rationale for stating that academics would not favour trade union involvement?</p>
<p>10. A LIST OF EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES THAT WILL BE REQUIRED</p> <p>A computer is most appropriate to analyse data in this regard.</p>	<p>This statement does not constitute a list. Which computer package will be used? Any other equipment or facilities?</p>

<p>11. PROGRAMME/ SCHEDULE</p> <p>Progress reports will be submitted per chapter per month after 1st March 1999 until the whole project is completed.</p>	<p>A detailed research plan is required. When will the literature study be conducted? When will the survey instrument be compiled? When will it be distributed? When will data be collected and analysed? When will results be discussed? When will language editing be done? When will the manuscript be typed? When will the final product be completed?</p>
<p>12. THE POSSIBLE IMPACT ON INDUSTRY AND/OR COMMUNITY</p> <p>Affirmative action practice has a bearing on national economic reconstruction issues. Production by well satisfied and qualified employees will result in increased production and subsequent economic increase. Economics often shudder at the costs affirmative action will demand to compensate for the inefficiencies that are likely to follow from some irregular affirmative action</p>	<p>This paragraph is one of the most important parts of your proposal. You should clearly indicate the value of your study for industry and the community. Once again, this discussion should be directly related to your topic.</p>

initiatives.	
<p>LIST OF SOURCES</p> <p>ADLER, GLEN. 1977. Cosatu's Fine Balancing Act. Mail Guardian. 19-25 September: 38.</p> <p>CONRAD, P.J. & MADDUX, R.B. 1988. Guide to Affirmative Action: A Primer for Supervisors and Managers. Menlo Park: CA Crisp.</p> <p>FINNEMORE, M. & VAN DER MERWE, R. 1992. 3rd ed. Introduction to Industrial Relations in South Africa. Johannesburg: Lexicon.</p> <p>GRIFFIN, R.W. 1990. Management. Boston: Houghton.</p> <p>HUGO, P & SCHRIRE, R. 1990. Affirmative Action in the Public Service: Critical Choices For South Africa- Agenda for the 1990's. Cape Town: Oxford.</p> <p>HUYSAMEN, G.K. 1994. Methodology for the Social and Behavioural Sciences. Halfway House: Southern.</p> <p>INNES, D 1993. Affirmative Action: Issues and Strategies. In Kentridge, M. & Perold, H. (Eds). Reversing Discrimination Affirmative Action in the workplace: 4-21. Cape Town: Oxford.</p> <p>KLUG, H. 1993. Affirmative Action in Action. Suid-Afrikaan: 20-25. May/June.</p> <p>ROSENFELD, M. 1991. Affirmative Action & Justice- A philosophical and Constitutional Inquiry. London: Yale.</p> <p>QUNTA, C. 1995. Who's Afraid of Affirmative Action. Cape Town: Kwela Books.</p> <p>ROSENFELD, M. 1991. Affirmative Action and Justice- A Philosophical and Constitutional Inquiry. London: Yale.</p> <p>WALTON, M & HENDY, J. 1997. Individual Right To Union Representation in International Law. International Law Journal, 26(3) 207-210. SEPT.</p>	<p>There are a number of mistakes in your list of references (you named it 'sources'), for example incorrect dates, the omission of subtitles, and incorrect alphabetical sequence.</p>

APPENDIX C

EXAMPLES OF LITERATURE REVIEWS

Source: Neuman, W.L. 1997. *Social research methods – Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 3rd edition, pp102-103.

EXAMPLE OF BAD REVIEW

Sexual harassment has many consequences. Adams, Kottke and Padgitt (1983) found that some women students said they avoided taking a class or working with certain professors because of the risk of harassment. They also found that men and women students reacted differently. Their research was a survey of 1,000 men and women graduate and undergraduate students. Benson and Thompson's study in *Social Problems* (1982) lists many problems created by sexual harassment. In their excellent book, *The Lecherous Professor*, Dziech and Weiner (1990) give a long list of difficulties that victims have suffered.

Researchers study the topic in different ways; Hunter and McClelland (1991) conducted a study of undergraduates at a small liberal arts college. They had a sample of 300 students and students were given multiple vignettes that varied by the reaction of the victim and the situation. Jaschik and Fretz (1991) showed 90 women students at mideastern university videotape with a classic example of sexual harassment by a teaching assistant. Before it was labeled as *sexual harassment* few women called it that. When asked whether it was sexual harassment, 98 percent agreed. Weber Burdin and Rossi (1982) replicated a previous study on sexual harassment only they used students at the university of Massachusetts. They had 59 students rate 40 hypothetical situations. Reilly Carpenter, Dull and Bartlett (1982) conducted a study of 250 female and 150 male undergraduates at the University of California at Santa Barbara. They also had a sample of 52 faculty. Both samples completed a questionnaire in which respondents were presented vignettes of sexual-harassment situations that they were to rate Popovich et al (1986) created a hire-item scale of sexual harassment. They studied 209 undergraduates at a medium-sized university in groups of 15 to 25. They found disagreement and confusion amongst students.

EXAMPLE OF BETTER REVIEW

The victims of sexual harassment suffer a range of consequences, from lowered self-esteem and loss of self-confidence to withdrawal from social interactions, changed career goals, and depression (Adams, Kottke, and Padgitt, 1983; Benson and Thompson, 1982; Dziech and Weiner, 1990). For example, Adams, Kottke, and Padgitt (1983) noted that 13 percent of women students said they avoided taking a

class or working with certain professors because of the risk of harassment.

Research into campus sexual harassment has taken several approaches. In addition to survey research, many have experimented with vignettes or presented hypothetical scenarios (Hunter and McClelland 1991; Jaschik and Fretz, 1991; Popovich et al 1987; Reilley, Carpenter, Dull and Bartlett, 1982; Rossi and Anderson, 1982; Valentine- French and Radtke, 1989; Weber- Burdin and Rossi 1982) Victim verbal responses and situational factors appear to affect whether observers label a behavior as harassment. There is confusion over the application of a sexual harassment label for inappropriate behavior. For example: Jaschik and Fretz (1991) found that only 3 percent of the women students shown a videotape with a classic example of sexual harassment by a teaching assistant, initially labeled it as sexual harassment. Instead they called it “sexist, rude, unprofessional or demeaning”. When asked whether it was sexual harassment, 98 percent agreed. Roscoe et al (1987) reported similar labeling difficulties.

APPENDIX D

RESEARCH SOURCES

All research has a conceptual basis – a perspective from which the story is being told, from which the picture is being painted.

All research is literature-based. (Some research is *only* literature based; other research is literature-based combined with empirical fieldwork. All empirical findings must be analyzed in terms of contextual, conceptual and methodological frameworks.)

LITERATURE

Literature is a necessary source on which you draw in order to help you answer your research question.

Primary sources: policies, laws, curricula outlines, historical diaries, newspapers, original narratives, “raw” statistics, etc.

Secondary sources: articles in journals, academic books, websites (Internet) on: written up case studies, conceptual analyses, sociological / economic / psychological interpretations and analyses, comparative studies, literary studies, historical interpretations, statistical studies, etc.

EXPERIMENT

If your research will involve an experiment, you need to address the following questions in your proposal:

What is the hypothesis?

What kind of experiment? Why?

Has it been done before? Where?

What are the variables? Why these?

Details of the experiment: where will it be done? When? How often? Why?

How many will be involved? Who? What is your sample? How are you going to choose it?

What preparation will you need to make?

How will you monitor the experiment?

What are your assessment criteria and how will you verify the results?

INTERVIEWS

If your research will involve interviews, you need to address the following questions in your proposal:

What do you want to find out? What is the purpose of the interviews?

Who are you going to interview? Why?

How many are you going to interview? Why this number?

When / how often are you going to interview? Why?

What are the criteria for your interview sample? For example, are you going to consider: age, gender, socio-economic levels, status, job position, geographical distribution, institutional affiliations? Why?

What will be the structure of your interview? Why?

In what language will you be interviewing? What language will your interviewees respond in? What might be some of the implications?

How will you ensure confidentiality of information and adherence to ethical principles of research?

Perceptions of interviewees vs facts. How will you substantiate the responses?

What are the practical arrangements you will need to make? Access? Time? Equipment? Transcriptions? Costs?

QUESTIONNAIRES

If your research will involve questionnaires, you need to address the same questions as those for interviews.

SURVEYS

If your research will involve surveys, you need to address the same questions as those for interviews.

CASE STUDIES / FOCUS GROUPS

If your research will involve case studies or focus groups, you need to address the same questions as those for interviews.

Also, what will be the limits of your case study?

OBSERVATION

If your research will involve observation, you need to address the same questions as those for interviews.

Also, what will be your observation criteria?

How will you record these?

Will you be using Triangulation? Why? How will you plan for this?

STATISTICS / GRAPHS / TABLES

If you are going to draw substantially on statistics in your research, you need to address the following questions in your proposal:

What is the purpose for including these statistics?

What are your criteria for analysis?

Will you be using a computer package? If so, which one? Why?

APPENDIX E

VARIOUS CHECKLISTS FOR PROPOSALS

Source: Welman, J.C. and Kruger, S.J.1999. *Research methodology for the business and administrative sciences*. Johannesburg: Thomson Publishers.

PROPOSAL CHECKLIST
The Title
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• is a true reflection of the contents of the proposal.• is not too long yet descriptive.• contains the important variables.
The statement of the problem:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• is formulated clearly and understandably.• is formulated adequately in terms of defined concepts relevant to the topic and field of study.• does not relate to something trivial, but is of scientific theoretical and/or practical significance (so that it holds the prospect of an expansion of subject knowledge).• the theory, practical problem or previous research from which it proceeds logically, is clearly described.• explicitly sets out different points of view and assumptions.• is congruent to the title as well as the aim of the study (addresses the same issue/s)• culminates in research hypotheses or research questions which are formulated clearly in terms of the relationship between the important variables.
The Literature Review
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• is relevant to the aim and problem statement of the study.• is sufficiently comprehensive and used essential information sources.• offers a logically organized and integrated summary (in the researcher's own words, of course).• notes theories relevant to the aim of the study.• Presents previous research technically correctly and provides justified criticisms of flaws in it.• includes key words/terms/concepts used in a computer literature search with a copy of its results.
The research design
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• is appropriate for the problem in question (survey- or experimental- or

case study design, and so on).

- is described clearly in respect of the following aspects (so that it is replicable):
 - (i) sampling procedures (so that, for example, the experimentally accessible population is clear):
 - (ii) the way in which the respondents will be classified or the participants are to be assigned to groups; and
 - (iii) interventions (if appropriate) and/or measuring instruments administered to subjects.
- takes care of threats to internal validity (for example: nuisance and third-variable problems, pre-existing differences between groups, and so on).
- takes care of threats to external validity (for example: the generalisability of the results from the sample to the target population and/or to other situations, and so on).

The measuring instrument

- contents are described briefly.
- administering and/or data gathering procedures are described.
- reliability is discussed.
- validity is discussed.

The analytical/statistical techniques:

- are appropriate for the given problem (descriptive and/or inferential).

The proposal:

- is limited to the required number of typed pages.
- includes a time schedule for the writing of different chapters.

CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATING THESIS PROPOSALS

Thesis Topic

- Is the problem clearly stated and defined?
- Is the topic researchable?
- Has the problem the potential to make an important or significant contribution to knowledge or practice?
- Is the scope of the research appropriate for the degree?
- Are the limitations inherent in the research project stated?
- Is terminology adequately defined?
- Are assumptions clearly stated?

Literature Review (Context)

- Is the literature relevant to the problem?
- Has the relationship between the problem and the previous research been outlined?
- Has the study been placed within an appropriate conceptual framework?

Methodology and Research Design

- Is the research method appropriate?
- Are the procedures clearly described to allow replication of the study?
- Are data collection instruments valid and reliable?
- Are the data analysis methods appropriate?
- Is ethical clearance likely to be approved?

Resources

- Are the necessary resources available?
- Has the acquisition of special skills (e.g. language, computer knowledge) been taken into consideration?

Time Frame

- Is the research project manageable within the time allowed for the degree?

CHECK LIST FOR RESEARCH GRANT APPLICATIONS

Source: MacLennan, R. and Leeder, S.R.. 1984. *Transactions of the Menzies Foundation*. Volume 7. pp 141-157.

CHECK LIST FOR RESEARCH PRPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

Aims of the Granting Body

Does the proposed research lie within the general or special areas of interest of the Granting body?

Ethics and Confidentiality

Does the proposed research meet ethical guidelines?

Formulation of the Research Problem

1. Present a clear, brief statement of the problem with concepts defined where necessary.
2. Show that the problem is soluble.
3. Describe the significance of the problem with reference to one or more of the following criteria:
 - (a) its relationship to the areas of interest of the Granting Body;
 - (b) relevance to a large population including social/economic benefits expected and how they could be assessed;
 - (c) it is timely and practical.

Background

4. Have you comprehensively reviewed the literature concerning the problem?
Have
Important previous findings been critically evaluated? Have you reviewed the results of animal and human experiments?
5. In what important areas is new knowledge needed? Will the proposed study Answer previously unanswered questions or confirm work that requires additional corroboration?
6. Is the problem on the cutting edge of current research? Is the problem, one which
is now 'ripe for solution', i.e. are there now techniques which will make the problem soluble.

The Hypotheses

7. What are the major hypotheses? Are they stated clearly, concisely, and in such a way that they can be tested? Have you spelled out all the operations and predictions indicated by the hypotheses? Are the hypotheses related to

- available techniques?
8. Are you trying to investigate too many questions in one research project?
 9. Are the concepts clearly defined, preferably in operational terms? Have you listed your concepts and defined them in words and in terms of particular operations (index calculations, types of observations etc.) or for many epidemiological studies in terms of person, time and place?

The Choice of Study Design

10. Have you considered the pros and cons of alternative study designs, with particular attention to the control of extraneous factors which may produce bias and confounding?
11. Describe the design you have selected including how control of extraneous factors is to be achieved.

Sampling Procedures

12. Specify the population to which the hypotheses are relevant.
13. Explain determination of size and type of sample, including relative importance of Type I error (false positive) and Type II error (false negative). Specify sample size and method of drawing or selecting the sample.
14. Is it feasible to obtain the necessary numbers of subject?

Collection of Data

15. Have you listed all the variables you wish to measure and checked to see if your instruments collect the required data with the detail necessary for analysis?
16. What are the logistical considerations in efficient collection of data? Have items of questionable importance or those that are unnecessary redundant been eliminated?
17. Have you presented the research instruments? Can you evaluate their validity and precision?
18. How will data be collected: e.g. by direct interview, all or part mail, telephone, or other means?
19. Who will be responsible for collecting the data and maintaining the quality control? Who will have the responsibility for the daily supervision of staff?
20. How will you cope with none-response (unavailables and refusals) and response error?
21. Does the research instruments lend itself to pre-coding?
22. Will computerized data files be established in such a way that information is easily retrievable through the use of standard data management and statistical packages?
23. Have you shown that you and your team have (or will have) the appropriate skills and expertise to satisfactorily complete the project? (Note: in Australia

there is a tendency to award grants mainly on the basis of excellent design. However, the main purpose of a grant is to do research to answer questions, not simply to help investigators acquire new skills and techniques).

Plan of Action

24. Prepare working guide with time and budget estimates, with attention to Planning; Pilot Study and Pretests; Drawing sample; Preparing observational material; Selection and training; Trial plan; Revising Plans; Collecting data; Processing data; Preparing final report.
25. Estimate total man-hours and cost. Budgetary details need to be worked out with very great care. In a institution, the local amount for on-costs and superannuation, etc., has to be included in the budgetary calculations, particularly of salaries. Budgets should not be artificially inflated and all requests for such things as maintenance and travel should be capable of being supported by documentary evidence. In fact, without adding reams of paper to the applications, some indication of the authenticity of claims for travel and maintenance certainly helps (for example, for a particular piece of equipment from a supplier or a letter from the institution indicating standard travel rates for employees of the project who may need to travel).

Analysis of Results

One of the most neglected areas in the average research proposal is that dealing with the analysis and interpretation of the data. Consultant statisticians should be invited to look at it. Any multidisciplinary research of any kind requires that all investigators involved in the study should have an opportunity of reviewing the proposal before it is submitted. Sometimes in grant proposals people are nominated as co-investigators and no-one is more surprised than they are when they hear about the grant.

26. How in general terms will data be handled in the analysis?
27. What attempts will be made to investigate possible sources of bias and their influence on the results?
28. How will the effects of subjects refusing to participate be evaluated?
29. Will vital statistics or data from other sources be used for comparison with study data? What precautions must be taken in doing so?

Ten ways to get your proposal turned down

1. Don't follow the directions or guidelines given for your kind of proposal. Omit information that is asked for. Ignore word limits.
2. Ensure that the title has little relationship to the stated objectives; and that neither title nor objectives link to the proposed methods or techniques.
3. Produce woolly, ill- defined objectives.
4. Have the statement of the central problem or research focus vague, or obscure it by other discussion.
5. Leave the design and methodology implicit; let them guess.
6. Have some mundane task, routine consultancy or poorly conceptualized data trawl masquerade as a research project.
7. Be unrealistic in what can be achieved with the time and resources you have available.
8. Be either very brief, or, preferably, long-winded and repetitive in your proposal. Rely on weight rather than quality.
9. Make it clear what the findings of your research are going to be, and demonstrate how your ideological stance makes this inevitable.
10. Don't worry about a theoretical or conceptual framework for your research. You want to do a down-to-earth study so you can forget all that fancy stuff.

NATIONAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION: Division for Social Sciences and Humanities: evaluation criteria

Any application for research funding submitted to the NRF's Division for Social Sciences and Humanities is evaluated by several reviewers who are recognized experts in the relevant field of study. The evaluation criteria fall into two categories.

Category 1 deals with the quality of the research proposal.

Category 2 looks at the impact of the proposed research.

CATEGORY 1. QUALITY OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL (SCORE 65)

1.1 Problem identification : (SCORE: 0-15)

- Is the problem/line of inquiry clearly identified?
- Has appropriate literature been examined in order to provide a background to the problem?
- Have other relevant sources been used to identify the problem?
- Are the aims and /or objectives of the inquiry clearly specified?

1.2 Approach : (SCORE : 0-15)

- To what extent is the conceptual framework and theoretical assumptions clearly stated?
- Is the project design, methods of data collection and analysis appropriate to the aims of the research?

1.3 Significance : (SCORE: 0-15)

- To what extent will the research make an original contribution or be an innovative application of knowledge to its disciplinary field and/or across disciplines?
- Is the proposed research a new line of inquiry?
- Is the proposed research likely to promote further investigation within and/or across disciplines and fields?

1.4 Feasibility : (SCORE : 0-15)

- Do the preliminary data and the available resources support the feasibility of the project?
- Does the researcher's track record or potential, support his/her ability to successfully accomplish the project?

1.5 Budget : (SCORE : 0-5)

- Is the budget justified in relation to the proposed research activities and in terms of NRF's regulations on permissible expenditure?
- Does the project include a plan for research and budget management?
-

CATEGORY 2. IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH (SCORE 35)

2.1 Within the research community : (SCORE: 0-20)

- Does the research promote teaching or does it have the potential to do so?
- Does the research project promote research training?
- Does the project include the participation of researchers, junior researchers and postgraduate students from historically disadvantaged institutions, race and gender groups?
- Is the research likely to create networks and partnerships locally, regionally and/or internationally?
- Is the research likely to promote the acquisition of new database, literature collections, computer software and hardware or to promote the development of existing database and literature collections?
- Is there a plan to disseminate the research findings within the discipline and across disciplines?

2.2 Outside the research community : (SCORE : 0-15)

- Is there a plan to disseminate the research findings amongst stakeholders and the wider public?
 - Does the research project have a potential social impact, i.e. promote problem solving, social policy development or evaluation, etc.?
-