How To Write A Proposal

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Variety is the Spice of Life!

Different Schools... ..... Different Rules

– Can you use ‘I’ in an academic text?
– Should an essay have section headings?
– How long is a report?
– Do you use primary or secondary research?
– Footnotes, endnotes or no notes?
– Harvard style referencing or MLA? What about APA?

Which school are you in? What is acceptable and what is unacceptable in your field?

Always check in your module handbooks or with your tutor if you are concerned about appropriacy
How To Write A Proposal Aims

— To discuss selecting a research question / area
— To become familiar with the typical structures of a proposal
— To become familiar with the typical content of a proposal
— To discuss applying for ethical approval
Common Proposal Concerns

Writing a proposal just seems like another hoop to jump through

What if I change my mind later and want to research something else?

I haven’t even decided what my Dissertation will be about yet!
What Is A Proposal?

Depending on your school and programme, your proposal may be slightly different. However most proposals include...

- A rationale for your research question
- An overview of the literature relating to your research question
- A proposed methodology
- A proposed timetable
- A proposed reading list
- Ethical Approval planning
Advice

There are three main pieces of advice when writing a proposal. What do you think these are?

— Be realistic
  • No one expects you to undertake a huge research study – you don’t need to reinvent the wheel to get a good grade.

— Research, research, research
  • Research before you begin planning your proposal to better identify a topic area
  • Research will help you focus on a question / hypothesis
  • You may chose to focus on an area you already know – but you still need to research

— Give Yourself Enough Time!
Timetable

A basic timetable for writing a Dissertation / Final Year Project is:

— Identify a topic area
— Make preliminary plans about how to address the topic area
— Translate these preliminary plans into a more detailed plan
— Submit a proposal
— Ethical Approval?
— Carryout the reading / conduct the research
— Write!

Give Yourself Enough Time!

You may also find it useful to attend the AWL Open Workshops on Introduction To Dissertations and Advanced Dissertation Writing.
Topic Areas For A Dissertation / FYP

Possible topic areas could include any of the following, so it’s important to remember that different schools have different expectations – it’s very likely that your Dissertation will include elements from more than one of these areas:

— A Practical Application
  • For example, developing education materials of building a prototype.

— An Artefact Study
  • For example, reflecting on or analysing a piece of art or architecture

— A Library / Conceptual Study
  • Usually focused only on secondary research; a detailed, extended essay or critique based on the literature

— A Research Based Study
  • This could be a case study / a report / an analysis / evaluation using interviews, observations and/or questionnaires (primary research)

— Testing an Hypothesis
  • This could be in the form of an experiment, but it could also include seeing if a theory is being (successfully?) applied to a situation
Research Questions

Deciding what your research question is going to be is a very challenging process. There are two common frameworks:

— A Need; a gap in the literature / field
  • A need of a gap in the literature / field could be an areas that had been ignored, or an area that has been under-developed, or even a new / original hypothesis

— Testing a hypothesis
  • Testing a hypothesis could be recreating an experiment, or testing a theory, or apply a concept to your context and evaluating it’s success / appropriacy
Create A Research Space (CARS)

If your research questions involves a gap in the field, the CARS method is useful
Create A Research Space (CARS)

There are three moves in the CARS model.

— Move One: Establish A Research Area
  • Claiming centrality, and/or
  • Placing your research within the field, and/or
  • Reviewing items of previous research
Create A Research Space (CARS)

There are three moves in the CARS model.

— Move Two: Establishing A Niche
  • Counter-claiming, and/or
  • Indicating a gap in the current research, and/or
  • Question raising, and/or
  • Continuing a tradition
Create A Research Space (CARS)

There are three moves in the CARS model.

— Move Three: Occupying The Niche
  • Outlining your purpose(s), and/or
  • Announcing your present research, and/or
  • Announcing your principle findings, and/or
  • Indicating research article structure
Testing A Hypothesis

Do you agree with the logic below?

Scientist observe a white pigeon

Scientist observe a white pigeon

Scientist observe a white pigeon

Hypothesis emerges: ALL PIGEONS ARE WHITE
Testing A Hypothesis

What if the next pigeon is grey? What if in some areas all pigeons are white, but not in others? What is the significance if all / some / no pigeons are white?

Things to consider when testing a hypothesis:

— Can you be a fully objective observer?
— Hypothesis must come **before** observation
— Inductive conclusions are **never guaranteed**
— You can show that hypothesis are **true** or **false**
  • Showing that something is true or false is **progress**
Testing An Hypothesis

Ask yourself these questions when deciding whether to test a hypothesis:

— Is the hypothesis clearly falsifiable?
— Is it surprising or does it confirm existing theories?
— Is it easy to test?
— Does it suggest further studies?
Writing A Proposal

- Analyse / Evaluate your topic
- Identify why you have chosen the research area
- Talk to your tutor
- Clarify your ideas
- Read the literature

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Developing Your Proposal

Stage One

The first step is to discuss your ideas with your current academic tutor in order to

— Agree a topic
— Agree a preliminary plan

If necessary, your tutor may refer you to another lecturer who has specialist knowledge in the field you are interested in.
Developing Your Proposal

Stage Two (1/2)

Organise your initial ideas for the Dissertation / FYP

— The topic area
— The proposed title
— The proposed focus
— The main research question
Developing Your Proposal

Stage Two (2/3)

When deciding your research question, the topic should be:

— **Interesting** to you personally

— **Relevant** to your work after your graduate (especially if you wish to continue your studies at post-graduate level)

— **Precise** – avoid superficial generalisations

— **Not to small or too large**, so that you avoid either **padding** or being **overloaded**
Developing Your Proposal

Stage Three

— Keep discussing the topic with your tutor – it will evolve the more you think about it / research it. This is perfectly natural, but your tutor will be able to keep you on track

— The Dissertation / FYP proposal you write will be a result of these conversations
Ethical Approval

If you are planning to carry out research that involves human participants you will need to get ethical approval before you may begin.

Types of research that will require ethical approval are:

— Interviews
— Observations
— Experimentation
— Questionnaires
Risk

Depending on the nature of your research, you may need to apply for ethical approval in one of the three following categories:

— **Low Risk**
  - Usually questionnaires and interviews with adults

— **Medium Risk**
  - Observations
  - Interviews where the participant may be asked to disclose sensitive information
  - Interviews / observations with minors

— **High Risk**
  - Physical experimentation
  - Real danger of causing physical / psychological harm
Ethical Considerations

It’s difficult to generalize in terms of ethical considerations to include in your proposal, but it is often true that you will need to describe:

— Aims and objectives of your study
— Your methods of data collection
— Who the participants will be
— How you will recruit them
— Where you will conduct your research
— How you will ensure informed consent
— Allowances for withdrawal
Ethical Considerations

You will also have to explain how you will be addressing the key ethical requirements of securing the informed consent of the participants, giving them the right to withdraw from the project and ensuring confidentiality of their data and anonymity.

Ethical approval documentation usually has to be signed by your tutor before submission.

You (usually) do not ethical approval when submitting your proposal, but you need to show an awareness of the issues you will face and factor these into your timetabling.
Proposal Outline

Although each school will have its own requirements, a general guideline is:

— Your name
— Your proposed tutor
— Area and focus
— Working title
— Abstract
— Literature review
— A projected timed-table
— Anticipated problems
— Proposed methodology
— Preliminary reading list

This can seem daunting. Don’t forget the other AWL Open Workshops available, including How To Write A Literature Review, How To Write An Abstract, and Writing Effective Paragraphs.
Common Focus Points

— Research Study
  • This should include discussion of research methods, piloting, subjects, timing, and how you will analyse your data

— Human Subjects
  • You will need to include time to apply for ethical approval – this can be very time consuming!

— Artefact Study
  • Specify the artefact you will be analyzing, and any frameworks you will use

— Practical Application
  • Include information about the scale and scope of the study, as well as the way materials will be produced and trialed.

— Library / Conceptual Study
  • Include projected chapter titles and notes about each, as well as a plan of when each chapter will be written. Literature reviews are often required as well.
This paper would like to explore the feelings and views of monolingual native speakers of English about the now common use of ‘their’ language by speakers of English as a second, other or foreign language for international communication. In particular, it is interested in exploring to what extent this has an impact on the sense of identity of monolingual native speakers in the public sphere, and if so what is the nature of this impact.

There have been a number of studies into linguistic identity and linguistic imperialism (see for example Phillipson 1992, Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas 1995, Widdowson 1994, Crystal 2003, Jenkins 2009), especially with the advent of the spread of English as a global language (whether EIL or ELF). Most recently there has been a focus on the need for non-native English speakers to have a sense of ownership of, and identity with, the English language. Studies into learner identity when communicating in written and spoken forms in a foreign language within a university context (Lea & Street 1998, Norton-Piece 1995, Norton 1997), and within a language learning context (Firth & Wagner 1997, Block 2003) as well as studies into native and non-native speaker power (Block & Cameron 2002, Luk & Lin 2006) and international intelligibility (Jenkins 2002, Luk & Lin 2006) have been conducted. All have recommended that, on the basis of the qualitative data they have gathered, the ownership of English be moved away from the central, inner circle to be shared by all speakers. These claims are not disputed, however, there is seemingly very little research yet in the area of the monolingual native English speakers’ sense of identity within a global context when most other speakers have access to what is for them their one and only L1. This paper will question whether monolingual native English speakers’ sense of identity is affected by this shared ownership, and if so in what way. It will also discuss whether and, if so, how this has changed their linguistic behaviour (e.g. do they have strategies for asserting a separate linguistic identity?).
## Anticipated Problems (Example)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethical Approval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I will work closely with my tutor and the ethics committee to ensure that I follow the correct procedures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruiting Participants</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants must be monolingual native English speakers, and be volunteers, agreeing to participate of their own free will. I will advertise via various social media platforms for interested parties. I will then meet with them and explain the nature of the research and interview process. This will be time consuming, so I have allowed three months maximum for this process in order to factor in delays.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Logistics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I may have to meet participants at various different points to gain the level of trust and detail that is required. This may mean travelling to participants, and working around their schedules. I have factored in three months for this process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Withdrawal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some participants may wish to withdraw their data from the sample. I will set a clear deadline for withdrawal. This will leave time to re-recruit new participants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Samples?

Some schools will have sample proposals from previous years – ask your tutor or subject librarian if you can review these.

Make sure you know what is expected in your school – a proposal for the school of law may be very different from a proposal for adult nursing.
Points To Remember

— Give yourself enough time!
  • It’s a marathon, not a sprint – make sure when writing your proposal you create a realistic time-table!

— Don’t forget word limits

— Always check with your tutor

— Know your deadlines

— Remember – it’s a proposal
  • It isn’t set in stone, it’s flexible. Once you have submitted your proposal you will be assigned a supervisor – s/he can help you iron out any problems, or guide you when your research questions changes (which it invariable will, as you learn more about the subject area)
Where now?

— Need more detailed assistance? Book a tutorial!
— Want feedback on a specific section? Drop in to Getting Your Assignment Ready!
— Want somewhere quiet to write, and get on the spot assistance? Try The Writing Space!
— Got a few quick questions? AWL Office Hours at [The Study Hub] are for you!

— AWL Open Workshops can be booked here!

• Suggestions:
  – How To Write A Literature Review
  – How To Write An Abstract
  – Writing Effective Paragraphs
  – Introduction To Dissertations
  – Advanced Dissertation Writing
It's QUESTION TIME!!