

Research Prospectus

You will be doing a lot of writing throughout your academic career as a master's level student whether you're pursuing an MA in English or an MSN in nursing. This assignment is designed to provide you an opportunity to more fully develop your writing skills in a manner that occurs frequently at the graduate level: the paper topic proposal. If you do a thesis option, the research prospectus is often required. If you go beyond the MA, a prospectus is required. Regardless, this will help you as you continue your graduate studies.

Over the last few weeks, I have had you work on your statement of research/problem statement, your annotated bibliography, your literature review (relevant to the problem statement you wrote) and now, you're going to write a research prospectus.

A research prospectus is a preliminary plan for conducting a study. This is not a detailed, technical research proposal, but, rather, a considered analysis of the issues you are likely to confront in such a study. In essence, it is a preliminary proposal.

The goal of the prospectus is to show that a) it is possible for you to do a substantial piece of research on this topic, b) that it will answer or seriously explore the question you have formulated, c) it can be completed within the time available to you, and d) what you will do about it. Obviously you can only do a good prospectus when you have actually done a significant share of the research involved for the project. You must be able to show specifically that the basic components you need for a logical analysis are available in certain key sources. The best way to do this is by actually drawing on some of your sources to illustrate how they will serve your needs.

*Thus, the prospectus is in part an intellectual justification for, and in part a mini-version of a full research proposal. That means your question must be fairly fully conceptualized, explored.

Research Problem. What is the research problem you are trying to solve?
[A problem is a situation that, left untreated, produces a negative

consequence for some group, institution or individual(s). “Girls score lower on technology attitude scales than boys” isn’t necessarily a problem; “girls are less inclined to pursue careers in technology-related fields” is.] What makes it a problem? For whom? Who says so?

Assumptions. On what assumptions are you basing your work? Which of them seem to be verifiable in the literature? Which are more speculative?

Theoretical Issues. What theoretical issues arise in your proposed study? For example, “theoretically,” how would you explain this problem and the results you suspect you might get to another scholar? (Do you take a behavioral view? Social systems view?) Are there other theoretical orientations that should be considered in the design of your study?

Literature Review. What, in general, does the literature say about your topic? [This need not be a complete review, but you should cite some of the major theory, research and writers in the field.]

Research Questions. Based on your problem, what are the research questions you are trying to answer? Why and how will answering these questions contribute to solving the research problem? Remember...a research question can be answered ONLY with data or information.

General Research Plan. In general, how would you propose to conduct this research study so that it answers your research questions? What kind of data will you gather (specify type, such as surveys, observations, interviews...or some combination of these types)? From whom will you gather it? Why them? How will you reduce the data - make sense of it? How will you assure that the data are of high quality?

Anticipated Difficulties and Pitfalls. What kind of difficulties and pitfalls might you expect in doing a study of this type? What will you do to prevent them or minimize their effects?

Anticipated Benefits. Who will benefit from the fact that this research is undertaken? How? Why? Who might be disturbed this proposed study? How? Why?

This should be a thoughtful, reflective paper that presents a balanced view of the proposed study - both its problems and its opportunities. It should serve as a first, solid communication with your committee about the kind of thinking you have been doing on an anticipated area of inquiry that might comprise at least a portion of your thesis/dissertation work. In addition, be aware that individual disciplines look for different components in a prospectus. Consult with your committee to make certain you have all the information you need in order to begin compiling your prospectus.

*Adapted from: www.coedu.usf.edu/

Outline of a Prospectus

(adapted from reteyler@NC State)

- I. Introduction
 - a. Background/context/assumptions
 - b. Statement of the problem
 - c. Significance of the problem (include theoretical issues)
 - d. Statement of the purpose of the research (the purpose of this research is....)
 - e. Research questions
- II. Literature Review
 - a. Systematic review of the research (oldest to newest, from broad to narrow)
 - b. Relevance of literature to problem being studied
- III. Methods (General Research Plan) (the Who and the How)
 - a. Participants
 - b. Procedure to collect data
 - c. Specific methods and why it's suitable for your study
 - d. Strengths and weaknesses of this particular methodology?
- IV. Anticipated difficulties / pitfalls of project
- V. Anticipated benefits
- VI. Conclusion / Implications