

Section

The proposal
'sells' your
project



**What
is the
purpose
of a
research
proposal?**

A



The research proposal is to be taken seriously!

In fact, it is the gatekeeper for being able to begin or continue your research journey. Its role is to help others assess you and your project's merit. The end game is to get your research off the ground.



Getting a green light

So it's all about getting that green light. In fact, very few research projects get off the ground without some sort of approval. It may be as simple as approval from your lecturer, but it could involve a formal approval process organized through an admissions board, an ethics committee, or a funding body. And, of course, you may need approval from more than one of these. Remember, great ideas are important, but it is the articulation of these ideas that will determine whether you get to cross the start line.

A research proposal is basically a sales pitch. Whether you're after approval from a lecturer, an ethics committee, university admission, or looking for funding, the role of the proposal is to convince the powers that be that what you are proposing meets their requirements. Namely, that the research question, the proposed methods, and the researcher all have merit.

DEMONSTRATING THE MERITS OF YOUR RESEARCH QUESTION

Essential to any successful proposal is selling the merit of your research question. This requires that you:

- clearly and succinctly articulate your research topic and question; and
- demonstrate that your research question is significant enough to warrant support (admission, funding, or ethics approval).

In assessing your question, there are four possibilities:

- 1 The worth of the research question is self-evident (e.g., ‘What are the most effective strategies for curbing cyber bullying?’) and you confidently argue the importance and significance of your question.



- 2 The worth of the research question should be evident, but you do a lousy job arguing the case, leaving assessors doubting why you were not capable of mounting a straightforward argument.
- 3 The worth of the research question is not self-evident (e.g., ‘Do UK residents enjoy watching Dance Mums more than US residents enjoy watching Dance Moms?’), but you are able to argue the case by citing evidence that attests to a real issue and the benefits of conducting relevant research (Good luck with that!).
- 4 The worth of the research question is not self-evident, and you don’t help your case. Your arguments are weak, and assessors are left to put your proposal in the reject pile.

DEMONSTRATING THE MERITS OF YOUR PROPOSED METHODS

Once assessors are convinced that your research question has merit, their focus will turn to methods. They will be looking to see if proposed methods:

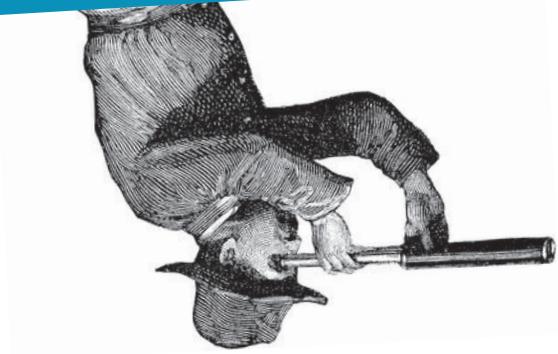
- 1 are clearly articulated.** If your assessors cannot make sense of what you're proposing, your proposal has little chance of getting off the ground.
- 2 are logical.** Do methods make sense and do the assessors believe your approach can lead to credible data?



- 3 have taken into consideration **potential hurdles** to effective data collection and analysis. Assessors know that all research is constrained; your job here is to acknowledge constraints and show the credibility of your methods despite any limitations.
- 4 **are ethical**. Ethics are central to all research processes (and of course the main focus of an ethics proposal). Your proposal needs to show that the dignity and well-being of respondents, both mentally and physically, are fully protected.
- 5 **are practical/doable**. It doesn't matter how logical and well-considered methods are if your assessors don't believe they can be implemented. You need to show that: you have or can develop necessary expertise; you can gain access to required data; your timeline is realistic; and you will come within budget.

DEMONSTRATING THE MERITS OF THE RESEARCHER

Let's assume the assessors are happy with both your question and your methods. The final issue is whether they think you're up to the task. Do they believe you have the necessary background knowledge, at least some familiarity with the literature, and the writing skills to get through?



It would be great if your assessors could get to know you and get a feel for what you are capable of. But that's not likely to happen. In fact, your proposal is likely to be reviewed by people you've never met. So how do they assess potential? Simply on your proposal. Assessors will judge your ability to engage with the literature through your proposal's short literature review. They will assess your ability to carry out method, based on how well you argue your methodological case. And they will assess your potential to write by the quality of writing in your proposal. Attention to detail, therefore, counts. Your proposal needs to be one of the tightest pieces of writing you have ever attempted.



Got it?

Q: What are the three things you need to do in your proposal to demonstrate that you are ready to undertake your research?

The logo features the text "Got it!" in a white, bold, sans-serif font, centered within a solid blue rectangular background. The top-right corner of the blue rectangle is cut off by a diagonal line, and the area above this line is filled with a pattern of small, light blue dots.

Got it!

A:

- 1 Be able to sell the merits of your research question
- 2 Be able to sell the robustness and integrity of your methodological design
- 3 Be able to sell yourself as a capable researcher

**A research proposal is a
blueprint for action!**

