

UNIT 10

The Write Up

Overview

In Units 1 to 9 we have discussed the various stages in the research process, from formulating the research topic to analyzing the data and finding answers to your research hypotheses/research questions. In Unit 10 our final unit, we discuss writing and putting together your research proposal. Although your proposal comes before you actually carry out your study, we saved it for last because you need to know all the various aspects of and steps in the research process before you begin planning your own. Your research proposal is your plan, which includes all the stages in the research for the research project that you intend to carry out. The plan or proposal is different from a report in that the proposal is written before the actual research is conducted (it speaks to a potential research study) while the report is written after the research study has been conducted (it speaks mainly to the findings in the research study).

Learning Objectives

By the end of this Unit you will be able to:

1. Explain the difference between a proposal and a report.
2. Identify the key elements in a proposal.
3. Identify key elements in the report.
4. Apply the key elements of a research project to the research proposal.
5. Write a complete research proposal using all the ten elements in a research project.

This Unit is divided into three Sessions as follows:

Session 10.1: The Research Proposal

Session 10.2: Main Elements in the Research Proposal

Session 10.3: The Research Report versus the Proposal



Readings & Resources

Required Readings

McCall, C. (2012). How to Write a Research Report. Retrieved at:

<http://www.ssrc.org/node/144>

Robson, C. (2002). Real World Research. Retrieved at:

<http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/robson/default.asp>

Somekh, B and Lewin, C. (2005). Research Methods in the Social Sciences. New Delhi: Vistaar Publications.

Trochim, William M. (2006). The Research Methods Knowledge Base, 2nd Edition. Retrieved at: <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/>

The Public Health Communication site. (2008). What is research? www.drcath.net

You are also advised to locate and read: Additional papers relevant to the topics covered.

Session 10.1

The Research Proposal

Now that you know all that the social research process entails, you are ready to plan and design your own research project and therefore write your research proposal. Research design is similar to the research proposal in that it provides the framework for the collection and analysis of data (www.drcath.net, 2008). Research design entails:

- Defining the problem/research question
- Review of related literature
- Planning the research
 - » What methodology will you use?
 - » What data do you want to use/produce?
 - » How feasible is your research approach?
- Ethical considerations

The research proposal is different from research design however in that it is a more formal and a written plan. It is a written document outlining a proposed research project. Further, it is a plan that you will follow when you are doing your study (Somekh & Lewin 2005). What you write in your plan comes from the ideas you generate during the research process. The proposal describes the problem and its importance and gives a detailed account of the methods that will be used and why they are appropriate. You need to write your proposal carefully and thoughtfully because it will determine the success of your research study.

Some reasons why proposals are written is to ask for funding of your research project, as requirement to be accepted in a program of study or showing how you plan to study a problem for academic or work purposes. In addition, your research proposal gives you guidance as you conduct your research study and will act as a reference for the supervisor to provide assistance to you during the research process. In this programme of study, you are learning how to prepare a research proposal for academic purposes and perhaps in your professional life you may be required to write a research proposal for funding a major study/project to be undertaken at work/within your organization.

The research proposal includes:

- Title
- Statement of research problem
- Background/information
- Aims and objectives of the study
- Methods
- Timetable
- Data analysis plan
- Ethical issues
- In funding applications, add
 - » Resources/budget
 - » Dissemination

There are several considerations when writing a research proposal. They include:

- Who is the audience? Is the research proposal being written for academic purposes or in order to obtain funding from a government or funding agency?
- Formatting considerations. This will be determined by who your audience is. If your proposal is being written to a major funding agency most times they have their own formatting requirements which must be adhered to. As the researcher you should thus be familiar with their formatting requirements before writing your proposal.



LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.1

Discuss your planned research proposal in the discussion forum with the following in mind:

- How would you clarify the reasons for planning the study?
- What does the study aim to achieve?
- How will it be done?
- Will the findings be useful?

Session 10.2

Main Elements in the Research Proposal

Your research proposal begins by providing the reader with some background to what you plan to do. It sets the context for your proposed study.

1. The background to the problem is like an introduction to the problem. In this section, you explain the roots of the problem, how wide spread it is and who are affected by the problem. You finally show why you think it is important to undertake a study of the problem. This background helps the reader have a clear picture of what you want to study.
2. The statement of the problem comes next. You are already familiar with this as you have already written your problem statements. In this section you need to state in a few sentences what you are actually going to study. It is true that you have said much about the problem of study in the background, but it is beneficial to give a summary of it under this part. The statement of the problem clearly shows your goals. The statement shows what is lacking, what is not known or gaps in literature and thus provides the justification for your study. Short and brief sentences should be used when stating the problem and they should not be more than a paragraph long.
3. The objectives of the study are the actions that you will perform to achieve the purpose of the study. When writing down research objectives you need to indicate what will be learnt, information that will be gained and what will be measured or described. Always use action words such as to identify, to measure, to examine, when writing down your objectives. Your objectives provide a benchmark against which to measure whether you have achieved your goals at the end of your research study.
4. Research questions or hypotheses follow from the objectives of the study. If you are doing a qualitative research, you should clearly state the research questions. For a quantitative study you should clearly state the hypotheses.
5. We have already discussed the meaning and importance of literature review in unit 4. In the literature review you provide readers with the history and critical assessment of the topic to be studied. It answers questions such as who has done this study, when (year), what did they find, where (place) and how did they go are the dot plot, the bar chart, the histogram, the stem- and-leaf plot, the frequency polygon

(a type of broken line graph), pie charts, and the boxplot (see Dean and Illowsky for examples of these: <http://cnx.org/content/m16849/latest/?collection=col10522/latest>) about this study (methods). In this section you also discuss the contribution that your own study will make to the wider literature on the topic or issue.

6. The methodology is where you describe your research design, what methods of data collection you will employ and why, your sampling plan and data analysis strategies. This section includes: sample plan (probability or non probability sampling strategy), data collection instruments (for example a questionnaire or to clean, code and analyze your data)
7. The ethics section discusses the ethical issues that may affect your study and how you intend to address them. In this section you may also discuss any other challenges or limitations that you foresee with your study.

For those research proposals aiming to obtain funding, they would include sections on timelines and budget. This section would discuss the time within which you intend to complete the study and the resources that will be needed to complete it.

The final section of your proposal is the references section. It contains the list of books, magazines, journals, and other literature you have cited. The reference list is written in alphabetical order and only books cited in literature are written. In case you write down books you have not cited but only read this will be called a bibliography.

Generally, the stages in the research proposal follow the order indicated above. There may be some slight variations however. For example, you may write the research objectives and research questions/hypotheses after the literature review. Or your timelines and budget could be written as part of the methodology section. The important thing to note is that the various sections need to have a logical flow based on the stages in the research process and stages within which the study is conducted.



LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.2

Imagine you have been asked to lead a research project at work. You need to obtain funding for this project from an international funder and the representative from this agency is scheduled to meet with you. What would be the main talking points that you would include in your presentation to this funder? Write down in point form your main talking points in the discussion forum. Comment on the points made by at least one of your peers.

Session 10.3

The Research Report Versus the Proposal

A research report describes how the problem was approached and analyzed and presents a discussion of the findings and the implications of these findings. A report also presents a complete detailed account of all experiences and thinking that the research went through in doing the study. A research report contains all the elements of a research design, and in addition presents, interprets, and evaluates the findings of the research. If you have written a sufficiently careful research design (and have been rather lucky), you may be able to incorporate your design in its entirety in your research report. In practice, however, few research projects go precisely as planned, and the original design will likely have undergone some modification before the finished report is prepared (McCall, 2012). Just as the research proposal, the report must take the following things into consideration:

- Who is the audience? Funder or academic audience such as your supervisor or examiner
- Are you writing a research report that you will submit for publication in a journal? If so, you should be aware that every journal requires articles that you follow specific formatting guidelines.
- Thinking of writing a book? Again, every publisher will require specific formatting.
- Writing a report for your thesis or dissertation? Every university I know of has very strict policies about formatting and style. There are legendary stories that circulate among graduate students about the dissertation that was rejected because the page margins were a quarter inch off or the figures weren't labeled correctly.

According to Trochim (2006) the research report has the following key elements:

Introduction

1. **Statement of the problem** - The general problem area is stated clearly and unambiguously. The importance and significance of the problem area is discussed
2. **Statement of causal relationship** - The cause-effect relationship to be studied is stated clearly and is sensibly related to the problem area.

3. **Statement of constructs** - Each key construct or concept in the research project is explained (minimally, both the cause and effect).
4. **Literature review** - The literature cited is from reputable and appropriate sources (for example professional journals and books) and you have a minimum of five references. The literature is condensed in an intelligent fashion with only the most relevant information included.
5. **Statement of hypothesis** - The hypothesis (or hypotheses) is clearly stated and is specific about what is predicted. The relationship of the hypothesis to both the problem statement and literature review is readily understood from reading the text. This is for a quantitative study.

Methods

Sample design – the strategies for selecting the sample is described and explained. The population and sampling frame are described.

Measurement - for questionnaires, tests and interviews: questions are clearly worded, specific, appropriate for the population, and follow in a logical fashion. The standards for good questions are followed. For qualitative measures, the procedures for collecting the measures are described in detail. You must address both the reliability and validity of all of your measures. For reliability, you must specify what estimation procedure(s) you used. For validity, you must explain how you assessed construct validity.

Design and procedures - the design is clearly presented in both notational and text form. The design is appropriate for the problem and addresses the hypothesis. An overview of how the study will be conducted is included. The sequence of events is described and is appropriate to the design. Sufficient information is included so that the essential features of the study could be replicated by a reader.

Results

1. **Statement of Results** - The results are stated concisely and are plausible for the research described.
2. **Tables** - The table(s) is correctly formatted and accurately and concisely presents part of the analysis.
3. **Figures** - The figure(s) is clearly designed and accurately describes a relevant aspect of the results.

Your main objective in presenting your findings must be to communicate clearly and this applies just as much to your tables as it does to your sentences. Tables and graphs should be placed as close as possible to the discussion of the data which they contain. They should be so structured and so titled that the reader can understand the figures presented in them without reference to the text surrounding them.

Conclusions, Abstract and Reference Sections

1. **Implications of the study** - Assuming the expected results are obtained, the implications of these results are discussed. The researcher mentions briefly any remaining problems which are anticipated in the study.
2. **Abstract** - The Abstract is 125 words or less and presents a concise picture of the proposed research. Major constructs and hypotheses are included. The Abstract is the first section of the paper but most times the researcher writes this section last.
3. **References** - All citations are included in the correct format and are appropriate for the study described.

Again, this provides an overall guide on how the report should be written. Just like the research proposal, you do not have to follow it exactly, as there may be some slight variations according to university or funding agencies' requirements.



LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.3

Answer the following questions about the research report:

- 1) Where is the list of references written?
- 2) Give an example of what might be included in an appendix. (3)
Where in the report is the appendix placed?
- 3) Where in the report is the Abstract placed?
- 4) What is the purpose of the Abstract and what should be included in it?
- 5) At what stage of writing the report is the Abstract written?

UNIT SUMMARY

In this final unit, we revisited the various stages in the social research process and discussed how to piece these steps together in a formal research proposal and research report. The link between the research design and research proposal has been explained, where the former is the data collection and analysis framework and the latter is the formal written plan expressing that framework. The unit has also discussed the differences between the research proposal and the research report. The proposal expresses intent while the report explains what has been done and disseminates the final results. The unit stresses that the format and structure of both the proposal and the report depends on the audience. While there are general guidelines to follow when writing these, there may be slight variations based on the audience.

References

- Heath, A. (1997). The proposal in qualitative research. *The qualitative report*, Vol 3, No. 1, March 1997. <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR3-1/heath.html>
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- Robson, C. (2002). Real World Research. Retrieved at: <http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/robson/default.asp>
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- Trochim, William M. (2006). The Research Methods Knowledge Base, 2nd Edition. Retrieved at: <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/>
- Walonick, D.S. (2005). Elements of a research proposal and report. Retrieved at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/24495903/Elements-of-a-Research-Proposal-and-Report>
- What is research? www.drcath.net 2008. Writing a research proposal. Retrieved at: <http://libguides.usc.edu/content.php?pid=83009&sid=2319840>