

**Week 12**

# **THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

**Amílcar Moreira**  
Dept. Social Sciences  
amoreira@iseg.uisboa.pt

# Objectives of Today's Class

**By the end of the class, students are expected to be able to:**

- Understand the objectives underlying the preparation of a Research Proposal;
- Understand how a Research Proposal is structured;
- Know the formal and substantive requirements to be met when preparing the Research Proposal within the RMMP assessment framework;

# What is a Research Proposal?

# What is a Research Proposal?

# What is a Research Proposal?

**In practice, there are different contexts in which it may be necessary to prepare a Research Proposal:**

- In the context of preparing a **Master's Dissertation**;
- In the context of applying for a **PhD programme**;
- In the context of preparing a **Doctoral Thesis**;
- In the context of applying for a **position in Higher Education** (Teaching or Research);
- In the context of **applying for research funding** (Scholarship, Project, Consultancy, etc.);

Source: Denscombe (2019: 10)

# Who Will Read the Research Proposal?

Regardless of the idea being presented, the Research Proposal should be written with the aim of **impressing the person/institution that will evaluate it!**



*What I look for in a good proposal is excitement.  
A proposal that is simply incremental turns me off.*  
— Quote from an experienced reviewer

Source: Crawley & O'Sullivan (2014:8)

# Who Will Read the Research Proposal?

Regardless of the idea being presented, the **Research Proposal** should be written with the aim of **impressing the person/institution that will evaluate it!**

Purpose of the proposal	People who evaluate the proposal
Approval for research project on a degree programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• master's research</li><li>• undergraduate project</li></ul>	Dissertation supervisors Project tutors
Applications for acceptance onto a research degree programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• PhD application</li></ul>	Research committees PhD supervisors
Funding applications <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• research grant</li></ul>	Review panels Subject experts

Source: Denscombe (2019: 10)

# What Objectives Should the Research Proposal Fulfil?

The Research Proposal should inform the evaluator about:

- What is the Objective? What is the Research Question? **(What)**;
- Why does it make sense / why is it necessary to conduct the proposed study? **(Why / So What?)**.
- How do we plan to achieve the objective / answer the Research Question? **(How)**;

Source: Punch (2000: 22)

# What Should the Research Proposal Cover?

# What Should the Research Proposal Cover? What, How & Why

According to  
Denscombe (2019):

Typical headings/sections	Key questions
Title	What is it all about?
Keywords	
Aims	
Background	
Literature review	What do we already know?
Research questions	What do we need to find out?
Methods	How will we get the necessary information?
Resources	How long will it take and what will it cost?
Ethics	Is the research socially acceptable?
Outcomes	What will be the end products?

Source: Denscombe (2019: 10)

# The Typical Structure of a Research Proposal? What, How & Why

**According to Wentz (2014):**

Component	Description
Cover Page	Contains the title, your name, committee member names, and the date.
Introduction to the Problem	Describes the general scope of the project and why it is important.
Literature Review	Synthesizes prior research and describes the theoretical framework of your research.
Objectives / Research Questions / Hypotheses	States the specific objectives, research questions, and hypotheses your proposal addresses.
Research Methods	Provides a detailed description of your research methods, including data collection and analytical approaches.
Project Significance and Implications	Explains the potential significance and implications of your project.
Annotated Timeline	Outlines an annotated timeline for anticipated completion of the research.
References (Alphabetized)	Provides an alphabetized list of references cited in the proposal.
Appendix (Optional)	Includes any supplementary material (optional).

Fonte: Wentz (2014: 165)

# The Research Proposal in RMMP

# The Research Proposal in RMMP

Component	Description
<b>Cover Page</b>	Contains the title, the student's name, the course name and lecturers, and the submission date.
<b>Table of Contents</b>	Include a general table of contents and, if applicable, list of tables and figures.
<b>Introduction</b>	Briefly describes the dissertation objectives, clarifies key concepts, justifies relevance, and presents the proposal structure.
<b>Literature Review</b>	Identifies the most influential papers that relate specifically with your topic and describe how each of these papers has contributed to its understanding
<b>Objectives, Research Question (and Hypotheses)</b>	Identifies the research problem and states objectives, research questions, and, if relevant, hypotheses.
<b>Methodological Approach</b>	Provides a brief description of the methodological approach and data collection strategy.
<b>References</b>	Provides an alphabetical list of references cited.
<b>Appendices (Optional)</b>	Includes any supplementary material (optional).

# The Research Proposal in RMMP: Cover Page

The cover page must include the following elements:

- Course name;
- Lecturers' names;
- Title;
- Student name;
- Submission date.

The cover page (and the entire document!) must follow the **formatting guidelines adopted at ISEG** (see Costa, 2021)



Undergraduate, Masters and Doctoral Course Units

2020/2021

RULES GOVERNING THE PRESENTATION OF  
WRITTEN WORK AT ISEG

Author:

Luis Filipe Pereira da Costa

*Translated from the Portuguese by Elizabeth Haikon*

ISEG, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2021

Source: Costa (2021)



# The Research Proposal in RMMP: Introduction

The Introduction must include the following elements, in this order:

- Topic framing (**What**);
- Definition/clarification of concepts;
- Justification of the relevance of the topic (**Why / So What?**);
- Identification of the objectives, research question and, if relevant, hypotheses;
- Description of the structure of the Research Proposal.

# The Research Proposal in RMMP: Introduction

**The Introduction must demonstrate the relevance, significance and broader value of the Master Final Work.**

Relevance Criterion	Description	Demonstration
<b>Development of Theoretical Knowledge</b>	Clarifies the debate/controversy in the theoretical literature on the topic to which the thesis aims to contribute.	Identify (in summary form) the main viewpoints in the literature and summarise the terms of the controversy (/theoretical gap).
<b>Development of Empirical/Disciplinary/Thematic Knowledge</b>	Clarifies the empirical/disciplinary/thematic debate in the literature on the topic to which the thesis aims to contribute.	Identify the (2–4) most significant studies in the field, highlighting the gap that will justify the research question.
<b>Design, Implementation and Evaluation of Public Policies</b>	Clarifies the public policy debate/problem to which the thesis aims to contribute.	Identify a relevant policy debate/issue or one that is central to policymakers; illustrate with statistics, reports or policy measures demonstrating the relevance of the topic.
<b>Analysis of / Intervention in Practical Reality</b>	Clarifies the social/business trend/problem to which the thesis aims to contribute.	Identify a relevant social/business trend; illustrate with statistics, reports, and articles from specialised journals/magazines demonstrating the relevance of the topic.

Fonte: Selwyn (2014)

# The Research Proposal in RMMP: Literature Review

The Literature Review in the Research Proposal **is not the same** as the Literature Review in the Master Final Work

- Much shorter;
- Map influential papers that relate specifically with your topic and describe how each of these papers has contributed to its understanding.

# The Research Proposal in RMMP: Literature Review

**In describing the contribution of each individual paper, highlight:**

- How each paper defines the dependent variable in your research question/topic;
- How each paper defines the independent variable(s) in your research question/topic;
- What data was used/collected - primary vs. secondary; type of data (survey, admin data, official statistics, etc.);
- If applicable, the type of statistical model adopted;
- Key findings.

# The Research Proposal in RMMP: **Research Problem/Research Question/Objectives**)

**This section should identify/delimit:**

- Specifies the Research Question in a clear and understandable manner;
- If applicable, it specifies the Hypotheses that will be subjected to empirical validation.

# The Research Proposal in RMMP: Outline of the Methodological Approach

**This section should, very briefly:**

- Specifies the Methodological Approach (Quantitative/Mixed) that will be used to respond to the Research Question;
- Specifies the data collection method that will be applied;
- Specifies how the Independent variable will be measured;
- If planning to implement a questionnaire, specifies (and justifies) the sampling technique to be adopted;
- Identifies the data analysis strategy.

# The Research Proposal in RMMP: **Formal Aspects**

The Research Proposal must comply with the following **formal requirements**:

Section	Requirements
Word Count	Maximum of 2000 words (excluding Front Cover, Index, and Bibliographic References).
Literature Review	maximum of 1000 words

# The Research Proposal in RMMP: **Formal Aspects**

**The Research Proposal must comply with the following **formal requirements**:**

- Pages are numbered;
- Table formatting (including caption) complies with formatting rules adopted by ISEG;
- Figure formatting (including caption) complies with formatting rules adopted at ISEG;
- ‘Bibliographic References’ section complies with Harvard Referencing system, adopted at ISEG;
- In-text Citations comply with Harvard Referencing system, adopted at ISEG;
- Avoid using indirect references (‘cit in’) in the text.

**That's all for today. I hope you enjoyed the Course Unit and found useful!**

2026-04-28