

CHAPTER 13

How to Write a Research Proposal

In this chapter you will learn about:

- The purpose of a research proposal in quantitative and qualitative research
- How to structure a research proposal
- How to write a research proposal

Keywords: *conceptual framework, data analysis, data processing, hypothesis, limitations, literature review, research design, research problem, sampling, study design, study objectives, theoretical framework, time-frame.*

The research proposal in quantitative and qualitative research

All research endeavours, in both qualitative and quantitative research, in every academic and professional field are preceded by a research proposal. It informs your academic supervisor or potential research contract provider about your conceptualisation of the total research process that you propose to undertake so that they can examine its validity and appropriateness. In any academic field, your research proposal will go through a number of committees for approval. Unless it is approved by all of them, you will not be able to start your research. Hence, it is important for you to study closely what constitutes a research proposal.

You need to write a research proposal whether your research study is quantitative or qualitative and in both cases you use a similar structure. The main difference is in the proposed procedures and methodologies for undertaking the research endeavour. When providing details

for different parts of the research proposal, for quantitative studies, you will detail quantitative methods, procedures and models and, for qualitative studies, your proposed process will be based upon methods and procedures that form the qualitative research methodology.

Certain requirements for a research proposal may vary from university to university, and from discipline to discipline within a university. What is outlined here will satisfy most requirements but you should be selective regarding what is needed in your situation.

A research proposal is an overall plan, scheme, structure and strategy designed to obtain answers to the research questions or problems that constitute your research project. A research proposal should outline the various tasks you plan to undertake to fulfil your research objectives, test hypotheses (if any) or obtain answers to your research questions. It should also state your reasons for undertaking the study. Broadly, a research proposal's main function is *to detail the operational plan for obtaining answers to your research questions. In doing so it ensures and reassures the reader of the validity of the methodology for obtaining answers to your research questions accurately and objectively.*

In order to achieve this function, a research proposal must tell you, your research supervisor and reviewers the following information about your study:

- *what* you are proposing to do;
- *how* you plan to find answers to *what* you are proposing;
- *why* you selected the proposed strategies of investigation.

Contents of a research proposal

A research proposal should contain the following information about your study:

- an introduction, including a brief *literature review*;
- *theoretical framework* that underpins your study;
- *conceptual framework* which constitutes the basis of your study;
- *objectives or research questions* of your study;
- *hypotheses* to be tested, if applicable;
- *study design* that you are proposing to adopt;
- *setting* for your study;
- *research instrument(s)* you are planning to use;
- *sampling design* and *sample size*;
- *ethical issues* involved and how you propose to deal with them;
- *data processing procedures*;
- *proposed chapters* of the report;
- *problems and limitations* of the study;
- *proposed time-frame* for the project.

A research proposal should communicate the above contents clearly and specifically in such a way that anyone going through it should be able to undertake all tasks in the same manner as you would have. It should also:

- enable you to return to the proposal for your own guidance in decision making at different stages of the research process;
- convince your research supervisor or a reviewer that your proposed methodology is meritorious, valid, appropriate and workable in terms of obtaining answers to your research questions or objectives.

Universities and other institutions may have differing requirements regarding the style and content of a research proposal. Requirements may also vary within an institution, from discipline to discipline or from supervisor to supervisor. (The guidelines set out in this chapter therefore provide a framework within which a research proposal should be written.)

Your proposal should follow the suggested guidelines and be written in an academic style. It must contain appropriate references in the body of the text and a bibliography at the end. Your survey of the relevant literature should cover major publications on the topic. The **theoretical framework** for your study must emerge from this literature review and must have its grounding in empirical evidence. As a rule, the literature review includes:

- a **conceptual framework**, and theoretical and empirical information about the main issues under study;
- some of the major research findings relating to your topic, research questions raised in the literature and gaps identified by previous researchers.

Your literature review should also raise issues relating to the methodology you are proposing. For example, it may examine how other studies operationalised the major variables of relevance to your study and may include a critique of methodology relevant to your study. The critiques of methods and procedures should be included under their respective headings. For example, a critique of the sampling design you adopt should be included under 'sampling' or a critique to the study design should be discussed under 'study design'.

Note that the suggested research proposal structure does not contain a section entitled 'survey of the literature' or 'literature review'. This is because references to the literature should be integrated with your arguments conceptually rather than chronologically and should become a part of all the aspects of your research report from problem conceptualisation to conclusions. The literature should be reviewed under main themes that emerge from your reading of the literature and should be included in the 'introduction' and 'the problem'. Issues identified in the literature to do with research methodology and problems pertinent to the various aspects of research procedures should be discussed under their respective headings. For example, issues pertaining to the study design under 'study design', issues relating to sampling under 'sampling' and the literature pertaining to the research instrument under the 'measurement procedure'.

In suggesting this format it is assumed that you are reasonably well acquainted with research methodology and an academic style of writing. That is, you know how to write a set of objectives or construct a hypothesis, you are familiar with the various study designs and you can construct a research instrument and cite a reference.

The pages that follow outline a framework for a research proposal. The contents under each heading may vary markedly from discipline to discipline, according to the academic level of

the student (BA Hons, MA, PhD) and whether your study is predominantly quantitative or qualitative. For quantitative proposals you need to be very specific in proposing how you are going to undertake each step of the research journey, whereas for qualitative research proposals such details are not expected as your methodology is flexible and unstructured to accommodate in-depth search. However, you need to provide a broad approach to your enquiry as a part of your research proposal.

Each section of the proposed outline for a research proposal is divided into two parts:

- 1 a suggested title for the section and an outline of its contents;
- 2 examples outlining contents for the section – the same four examples of research projects, each taken from a different discipline, are used as illustrations in each section.

Preamble/introduction

The proposal should start with an introduction to include some of the information listed below. Remember that some of the contents suggested in this section may not be relevant to certain studies, so use your discretion in selecting only what is pertinent to your study. In writing this section, the literature review (see Chapter 3 on reviewing the literature) is of central importance as it serves two main functions:

- 1 It acquaints you with the available literature in the area of your study, thereby broadening your knowledge base.
- 2 It provides you with information on the methods and procedures other people have used in similar situations and tells you what works and what does not.

The type, extent and quality of a literature review are mostly dependent upon the academic level for which you are writing the proposal. The contents of this section may also vary greatly according to the subject area under study.

Start with a very broad perspective of the main subject area, before gradually narrowing the focus to the central problem under investigation. In doing so, cover the following aspects of your study area:

- an overview of the main area under study;
- a historical perspective (development, growth, etc.) pertinent to the study area;
- philosophical or ideological issues relating to the topic;
- trends in terms of prevalence, if appropriate;
- major theories, if any;
- the main issues, problems and advances in the subject area under study;
- important theoretical and practical issues relating to the central problem under study;
- the main findings relating to the core issue(s).

Four examples of possible topics for the preamble/introduction for a research proposal follow.

Example A

Suppose that you are conducting a study to investigate the impact of immigration on the family. The preamble/introduction should include a brief description of the following:

- The origins of migratory movements in the world.
- General theories developed to explain migratory behaviour.
- The reasons for migration.
- Current trends in migration (national and state).
- The impact of immigration on family roles and relationships (e.g. on husband and wife, on children and parents, on parental expectations of children, etc.).
- Occupational mobility.
- etc.

Example B

Suppose your research project is to conduct a study of the attitudes of foster carers towards foster payment in ... (name of the place/state/country). The preamble/introduction would include the following:

- The origins of foster placement, the philosophy of foster care, a historical overview of foster care and changes over the years.
- Reasons for foster care and changes over time.
- The origins of foster placement in ... (the country in which you are conducting your study).
- The effects of foster placement on children and parents.
- Policies with respect to foster care in ... (the region).
- The origins of foster care in ... (the region).
- Administrative procedures for foster care in ... (the region).
- The training of foster parents in ... (the region).
- The role and responsibility of foster parents.
- etc.

Example C

Suppose that you plan to study the relationship between academic achievement and social environment. The preamble/introduction would include the following:

- The role of education in our society.
- Major changes in the philosophy of education over time.

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(Continued)

- Factors affecting attitudes towards education.
- The development of education in ... (country).
- Trends in education participation rates in ... (country) with particular reference to the region in which the study is being carried out.
- Changing educational values.
- Role of parents and peers in academic achievement.
- Impact of social environment on academic achievement.
- etc.

Example D

Suppose you are undertaking a qualitative study to find out what it means to have a child with ADHD in the family. The preamble/introduction should include your thoughts and arguments, and what the literature says around the following aspects of ADHD.

- Definitions and symptoms of ADHD.
- Causes of ADHD.
- Medical perspective on ADHD.
- Effects of ADHD on family life.
- Treatment for ADHD.
- Implications for a child if untreated.
- Management of ADHD.
- etc.

The problem

Having provided a broad introduction to the area under study, now focus on issues relating to its central theme, identifying some of the gaps in the existing body of knowledge. Identify some of the main unanswered questions. Here some of the main research questions that you would like to answer through your study should also be raised, and a rationale and relevance for each should be provided. Knowledge gained from other studies and the literature about the issues you are proposing to investigate should be an integral part of this section. Specifically, this section should:

- identify the issues that are the basis of your study;
- specify the various aspects of/perspectives on these issues;

- identify the main gaps in the existing body of knowledge;
- raise some of the main research questions that you want to answer through your study;
- identify what knowledge is available concerning your questions, specifying the differences of opinion in the literature regarding these questions if differences exist;
- develop a rationale for your study with particular reference to how your study will fill the identified gaps.

The following examples outline the topics about which the literature should be reviewed and included in the section entitled ‘The problem’. Keep in mind that these are just suggestions and should serve only as examples for you to develop and change as you feel appropriate for your own study.

Example A

- What settlement process does a family go through after immigration?
- What adjustments do immigrants have to make?
- What types of change can occur in family members’ attitudes? (Theory of acculturation etc.)
- What is the possible impact of settlement on family roles and relationships?
- In terms of impact, what specific questions do you want to answer through the study? What does the literature say about these questions? What are the different viewpoints on these issues? What are your own ideas about these questions?
- What do you think will be the relevance of the findings of your study to the existing body of knowledge and to your profession?
- How will the findings add to the body of knowledge and be useful to professionals in your field?
- etc.

Example B

- What are the broad issues, debates, arguments and counter-arguments regarding foster-care payment?
- What are the attitudes of foster parents to the amount, mode and form of payment and what does the literature say about these issues?
- What are the different viewpoints/perspectives regarding payment for foster care?
- What main questions will your study answer?
- How will your findings help in policy formulation and programme development?
- etc.

Example C

- What theories have been developed to explain the relationship between academic achievement and social environment?
- What is the relationship between educational achievement and social environment: what theoretical model will be the basis of your study?
- What do previous theories and researches have to say regarding the components of the theoretical model and academic achievement? For example, the relationship between academic achievement and:
 - the self-esteem and aspirations/motivation of a student;
 - peer group influence;
 - parental involvement and its relationship with their socioeconomic status;
 - the motivation and interest of students in the subject;
 - employment prospects;
 - relationship with a teacher;
 - etc.

Example D

- What are the effects on the family of having a child with ADHD in the family as identified in the literature?
- According to the literature, are there any differences between these effects and the type of family?
- What strategies have been used for the management of ADHD by a family?
- What effects, according to the literature, does ADHD have on sibling relationships?
- What are the perceptions of family members about the effects and management of ADHD?
- How do families cope when they have a child with ADHD in the family?
- etc.

Objectives of the study

In this section include a statement of both your study's main and subobjectives (see Chapter 4). Your main objective indicates the central thrust of your study whereas the subobjectives identify the specific issues you propose to examine.

The objectives of the study should be clearly stated and specific in nature. Each subobjective should delineate only one issue. Use action-oriented verbs such as 'to determine', 'to find out' and 'to ascertain' in formulating subobjectives, which should be numerically listed. If the objective is to test a hypothesis, you must follow the convention of hypothesis formulation in wording the specific objectives.

In qualitative studies the statement of objectives is not as precise as in quantitative studies. In qualitative studies you should simply mention an overall objective of the study as your aim is to explore as much as possible as you go along. As you know, the strength of qualitative research is in flexibility of approach and the ability to incorporate new ideas while collecting data. Having structured statements that bind you to a predetermined framework of exploration is not a preferred convention in qualitative research. Statements like to explore ‘what does it mean to have a child with ADHD in the family?’, ‘how does it feel to be a victim of domestic violence?’, ‘how do people cope with racial discrimination?’, ‘the relationship between resilience and yoga’ or ‘reconstructing life after bushfire’, are sufficient to communicate your intent of objectives in qualitative research. More detailed objectives, if need be, can be developed after a study is complete.

Example A

Main objective:

To ascertain the impact of immigration on the family.

Subobjectives:

- 1 To determine the impact of immigration on husband/wife roles as perceived by immigrants.
- 2 To find out the impact of immigration on marital relations.
- 3 To ascertain perceived changes in parental expectations of children’s academic and professional achievement.
- 4 To determine perceived changes of attitude towards marriage in the study population.

Example B

Main objective:

To determine the opinion of foster carers about the form and extent of foster payment they feel they should receive for taking care of a foster child.

Subobjectives:

- 1 To determine the form and mode of payment for taking care of a foster child.
- 2 To identify the factors that foster parents believe should be the basis for determining the rate of payment for fostering a child.
- 3 To determine the relationship, if any, between the socioeconomic graphic characteristics of foster parents and their views on payment.

Example C

Main objective:

To examine the relationship between academic achievement and social environment.

Subobjectives:

- 1 To find out the relationship, if any, between self-esteem and a student's academic achievement at school.
- 2 To ascertain the association between parental involvement in a student's studies and his/her academic achievement at school.
- 3 To examine the links between a student's peer group and academic achievement.
- 4 To explore the relationship between academic achievement and the attitude of a student towards teachers.

Example D

Main objective:

To explore what it means to have a child with ADHD in the family.

Hypotheses to be tested

A hypothesis is a statement of your assumptions about the prevalence of a phenomenon or about a relationship between two variables that you plan to test within the framework of the study (see Chapter 6). If you are going to test hypotheses, list them in this section.

When formulating a hypothesis you have an obligation to draw conclusions about it in the text of the report. Hypotheses have a particular style of formulation. You must be acquainted with the correct way of wording them. In a study you may have as many hypotheses as you want to test. However, it is *not* essential to have a hypothesis in order to undertake a study – you can conduct a perfectly satisfactory study without formulating a hypothesis.

Example A

H_1 = In most cases there will be a change in husband/wife roles after immigration.

H_2 = In a majority of cases there will be a change in parents' expectations of their children.

H_i = etc.

Example B

H_1 = Most people become foster parents because of their love of children.

H_2 = A majority of foster parents would like to be trained to care for foster children.

H_i = etc.

Example C

H_1 = A student's self-esteem and academic achievement at school are positively correlated.

H_2 = The greater the parental involvement in a student's studies, the higher the academic achievement.

H_3 = A student's attitude towards teachers is positively correlated with his/her academic achievement in that subject.

H_i = etc.

Example D

Hypotheses are not constructed in qualitative research.

Study design

Describe the study design (for details see Chapter 8) you plan to use to answer your research questions. (For example, say whether it is a case study, descriptive, cross-sectional, before-and-after, experimental or non-experimental design.) Identify the strengths and weaknesses of your study design.

Include details about the various logistical procedures you intend to follow while executing the study design. One characteristic of a good study design is that it explains the details with such clarity that, if someone else wants to follow the proposed procedure, s/he will be able to do exactly as you would have done. Your study design should include information about the following:

- Who makes up the study population?
- Can each element of the study population be identified? If yes, how?
- Will a sample or the total population be studied?
- How will you get in touch with the selected sample?
- How will the sample's consent to participate in the study be sought?
- How will the data be collected (e.g. by interview, questionnaire or observation)?
- In the case of a mailed questionnaire, to what address should the questionnaire be returned?

- Are you planning to send a reminder regarding the return of questionnaires?
- How will confidentiality be preserved?
- How and where can respondents contact you if they have queries?

Example A

The study is primarily designed to find out from a cross-section of immigrants from ..., ... and ... (names of the countries) the perceived impact of immigration on family roles. Initial contact with the ethnic associations for these countries will be made through the elected office bearers to obtain a list of members. Five immigrants will be selected from the list at random, and will be contacted by phone to explain the purpose of the study and its relevance, and to seek their agreement to participate in the study. Those who give their consent will be interviewed at their homes or any other convenient place. To select a further sample, a snowball sampling technique will be used until the desired sample size is obtained.

Example B

The study design is cross-sectional in nature, being designed to find out from a cross-section of foster parents their opinions about foster payment. All foster parents currently registered with the Department of ... (name of the office) constitute the study population. From the existing records of this department it seems that there are 457 foster parents in ... (name of the region). As it is impossible for the researcher, within the constraints of time and money, to collect information from all the foster parents, it is proposed to select a sample of 50 per cent of the study population with the proposed sampling strategy. The questionnaire, with a supporting letter from the department will be sent with a prepaid envelope. The respondents will be requested to return the questionnaire by ... (date). The letter from the researcher attached to the questionnaire will explain the objectives and relevance of the study, assure the respondents of anonymity and give them the option of not participating in the study if they wish. A contact number will be provided in case a respondent has any questions. In the case of a low response rate (less than 25 per cent), a reminder will be sent to respondents.

Example C

It is proposed that the study will be carried out in two government high schools in the metropolitan area. The principals of the schools most accessible to the researcher will be contacted to explain the purpose of the study and the help needed from the school, and to seek their permission for the students to participate in the study. As the constraints

of time and resources do not permit the researcher to select more than two schools, negotiations with other schools will cease when two schools agree to participate in the study.

It is proposed to select Year 9 students as the academic achievement of students in Years 8 and 10 could be affected by factors unique to them. Year 8 students may be experiencing anxiety as a result of having just made the transition to a new system. The motivation of students in Year 10 could be affected by their being at the stage in their education where they must decide if they will stay on at school.

In order to control the variance attributable to the gender of a student it is proposed to select only male students.

Once the principal of a school agrees to allow the study to be carried out, the researcher will brief the teacher in charge about the study and its relevance, and will arrange a date and time for administering the questionnaire.

When the students are assembled, ready to participate in the study, the researcher will explain its purpose and relevance, and then distribute the questionnaire. The researcher will remain with the class to answer any questions the students might have.

Example D

The researcher is known to a family that has a child with ADHD and that belongs to an ADHD support group which meets every month. The researcher proposes to make initial contact with the group through the known family. The researcher will attend one of the monthly meetings and brief the group on the purpose and relevance of the study, criteria for inclusion in the study, what it entails to be involved in the study, and other aspects of the study. The respondents will also be assured of the anonymity of the information shared by them and its ethical use. The members of the group will be encouraged to ask questions about any aspect of the study. Having sought their consent, the researcher will seek opinions of some group members to decide who should participate in the study in light of the inclusion criteria.

It is proposed to select six families, three where both parents are involved in the treatment and management of an ADHD child and three from families where the mother is the sole carer. This is primarily to see if there are differences in looking after a child with ADHD among different types of family.

The potential respondents will be individually contacted by the researcher to seek their consent for participation in the study. Once consent has been obtained the place and timings for interviews will be fixed with each family. Depending upon the type of family, the issues will be discussed either collectively with the father and mother or with the mother only. Before starting an interview their permission to record the interview on a tape recorder will be sought. Having completed the interviews, the researcher will transcribe the responses and a copy will be given to the respondents for confirmation and validation.

The setting

Briefly describe the organisation, agency or community in which you will conduct your study. If the study is about a group of people, highlight some of the salient characteristics of the group (e.g. its history, size, composition and structure) and draw attention to any available relevant information.

If your research concerns an agency, office or organisation, include the following in your description:

- the main services provided by the agency, office or organisation;
- its administrative structure;
- the type of clients served;
- information about the issues that are central to your research.

If you are studying a community, briefly describe some of the main characteristics, such as:

- the size of the community;
- a brief social profile of the community (i.e. the composition of the various groups within it);
- issues of relevance to the central theme of your study.

Note that, due to the nature of the content, it would be difficult to provide examples.

Measurement procedures

This section should contain a discussion of your instrument (see Chapters 9 and 10) and the details of how you plan to operationalise your *major* variables (Chapter 5).

To start with, justify your choice of research tool, highlighting its strengths and pointing out its weaknesses. Then outline the major segments of your research tool and their relevance to the main objectives of the study. If you are using a standard instrument, briefly discuss the availability of evidence on its reliability and validity. If you adapt or modify it in any way, describe and explain the changes you have made.

You should also discuss how you are going to operationalise the major concepts. For example, if measuring effectiveness, specify how it will be measured. If you plan to measure the self-esteem of a group of people, mention the main indicators of self-esteem and the procedures for its measurement (e.g. the Likert or Thurstone scale, or any other procedure).

Ideally, for quantitative studies you should attach a copy of the research instrument to your proposal.

Note that, due to the nature of the content, it would be difficult to provide examples for this section.

Ethical issues

All academic institutions are particular about any ethical issues that research may have. To deal with them, all institutions have some form of policy on ethics. You need to be acquainted with your institution's policy. It is imperative that in your proposal you identify any ethical issues and describe how you propose to deal with them. You need to look at the ethical issues particularly from the viewpoint of your respondents and, in case of any potential 'harm', psychological or otherwise, you need to detail the mechanism in place to deal with it. Further information on ethical issues is provided in Chapter 14.

Sampling

Under this section of the proposal include the following (consult Chapter 12 on sampling):

- the size of the sampling population (if known) and from where and how this information will be obtained;
- the size of the sample you are planning to select and your reasons for choosing this size;
- an explanation of the sampling design you are planning to use in the selection of the sample (simple random sampling, stratified random sampling, quota sampling, etc.).

Example A

Because a lack of information as to the exact location of migrant families makes it difficult to use a probability sampling design, it is proposed that the researcher will employ a snowball sampling technique. The researcher will make initial contact with five families who have emigrated from ... (name of the country) during the past seven to ten years, who are either known to him/her or on the basis of information obtained from the office bearers of the formal associations representing the migrant groups. From each respondent the researcher will obtain names and addresses of other immigrants who have come from the same country during the same period. The respondents thus identified will then be interviewed and asked to identify other respondents for the researcher. This process will continue until the researcher has interviewed 70 respondents.

Example B

Because of the constraints of time and resources it is proposed to select 50 per cent of the foster parents currently registered (457) with the department using the systematic random sampling technique. Every other foster parent registered with the department will be selected, thus 229 individuals will constitute the sample for the study.

Example C

The selection of schools will be done primarily through quota sampling. Schools will be selected on the basis of their geographical proximity to the researcher. The researcher will prepare a list of schools, in rank order, of accessibility. Once two schools agree to participate in the study, negotiations with other schools will cease.

All Year 9 male students will constitute the study population. It is expected that the sample will not exceed 100 students.

Example D

It is proposed to use the judgemental/purposive sampling technique to select six families from the group, three where both parents look after an ADHD child and three where only the mother has the main responsibility (single parent families). On the basis of informal discussions with the group members, those families who are expected to be information rich in treating and managing a child with ADHD will be selected to be interviewed.

Analysis of data

In general terms, describe the strategy you intend to use for data analysis (Chapter 15). Specify whether the data will be analysed manually or by computer. For computer analysis, identify the program and where appropriate the statistical procedures you plan to perform on the data. For quantitative studies also identify the main variables for cross-tabulation.

For qualitative studies, describe how you plan to analyse your interviews or observation notes to draw meanings from what your respondents have said about issues discussed or observation notes made. One of the common techniques is to identify main themes, through analysing the contents of the information gathered by you in the field. You first need to decide whether you want to analyse this information manually or use a computer program for the purpose.

There are three ways to proceed with content analysis:

- 1 From your field notes develop a framework of your write-up and as you go through your notes directly integrate that information within the structure developed. If you adopt this method, you need to be reasonably clear about the structure. It does not mean that you cannot develop the structure as you go on analysing; still, a clear vision will be of immense help in slotting information gathered in the field by you into the write-up.
- 2 The second method is that you transcribe your field notes to be read by you over and over again to identify the main themes. These themes become the basis of your write-up.
- 3 There are computer programs such as NUD*IST, Ethnograph, NVivo specifically designed to handle descriptive data. You may prefer to use one of these programs. These programs are also based upon the principle of content analysis. The only difference is that instead of your searching manually, they identify where a particular text identifying the theme appears.

You need to specify which particular strategy you are proposing for data analysis for your study.

Example A

Frequency distributions in terms of:

- age;
- education;
- occupation;
- number of children;
- duration of immigration;
- etc.

Cross-tabulations:

Impact of husband/wife roles

- age;
- number of children;
- education;
- occupation;
- etc.

Example B

Frequency distributions in terms of:

- age;
- income;
- education;
- occupation;
- marital status;
- duration of foster care;
- number of foster children;
- etc.

Cross-tabulations:

Attitude towards foster payment

- age;
- number of children;
- education;

(Continued)

(Continued)

- occupation;
- etc.

Statistical tests to be applied:

- chi square;
- regression analysis;
- etc.

Example C

Frequency distributions in terms of:

- age;
- parents' occupation;
- parents' educational levels;
- students' occupational aspirations;
- parental involvement in students' studies;
- self-esteem;
- peer group influence;
- number of hours spent on studies;
- etc.

Cross-tabulations:

Academic achievement

- peer group influence;
- parental involvement in students' studies;
- self-esteem;
- occupational aspirations;
- attitude towards teachers;
- etc.

Example D

The in-depth interviews carried out with the families will be transcribed using Microsoft Word. These transcribed interviews will be closely studied to identify the main themes they communicate. These themes will be sorted by issues relating to management and treatment of a child with ADHD. The themes will then become part of the write-up.

Structure of the report

As clearly as possible, state how you intend to organise the final report (see Chapter 17). In organising your material for the report, the specific objectives of your study are of immense help. Plan to develop your chapters around the main themes of your study. The title of each chapter should clearly communicate the main thrust of its contents.

The first chapter, possibly entitled 'Introduction', should be an overall introduction to your study, covering most of your project proposal and pointing out deviations, if any, from the original plan.

The second chapter should provide some information about the study population itself – that is, some of its socioeconomic–demographic characteristics. The main aim of this chapter is to give readers some background on the population from which you collected the information. The second chapter, therefore, may be entitled, 'Socioeconomic–demographic characteristics of the study population' or 'The study population' or any other title that communicates this theme to readers. Titles for the rest of the chapters will vary from study to study but, as mentioned, each chapter should be written around a main theme. Although the wording of chapter titles is an individual choice, each must communicate the main theme of the chapter. In developing these themes the specific objectives of the study should be kept in the front of your mind.

If your study is qualitative, the main issues identified during data collection and analysis stages should become the basis of developing chapters. Having developed significant issues, the next step is to organise the main themes under each issue and develop a structure that you will follow to communicate your findings to your readers.

Example A

It is proposed that the report will be divided into the following chapters:

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: The socioeconomic–demographic characteristics of the study population
- Chapter 3: The impact on husband/wife roles
- Chapter 4: The impact on marital relations
- Chapter 5: The impact on expectations of children
- Chapter 6: The impact on attitudes towards marriage
- Chapter 7: Summary, conclusions and recommendations

Example B

The dissertation will be divided into the following chapters:

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: A profile of the study population

(Continued)

(Continued)

- Chapter 3: Foster carers' perceptions of their role
- Chapter 4: Attitudes of foster carers towards foster-care payment
- Chapter 5: The preferred method of payment
- Chapter 6: General comments made by respondents about foster care
- Chapter 7: Summary, conclusions and recommendations

Example C

The report will have the following chapters:

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: The study population
- Chapter 3: Occupational aspirations, self-esteem and academic achievement
- Chapter 4: The extent of parental involvement and academic achievement
- Chapter 5: Peer group influence and academic achievement
- Chapter 6: Academic achievement and student attitudes towards teachers
- Chapter 7: Summary, conclusions and recommendations

Example D

It is proposed that the report will have the following chapters:

- Chapter 1: ADHD: A theoretical perspective
- Chapter 2: Issues and difficulties faced by family members in bringing up a child with ADHD
- Chapter 3: ADHD and its perceived effects on the child
- Chapter 4: ADHD and its perceived impact on sibling relationships
- Chapter 5: Managing treatment
- Chapter 6: Perceived effects of ADHD on schooling of the child
- Chapter 7: Perceived effects of ADHD on relationships with other children
- Chapter 8: A case history
- Chapter 9: Summary and conclusions

Problems and limitations

This section should list any problems you think you might encounter concerning, for example, the availability of data, securing permission from the agency/organisation to carry out the study, obtaining the sample, or any other aspect of the study.

You will not have unlimited resources and as this may be primarily an academic exercise, you might have to do less than an ideal job. However, it is important to be aware

of – and communicate – any limitations that could affect the validity of your conclusions and generalisations.

Here, *problems* refer to difficulties relating to logistical details, whereas *limitations* designate structural problems relating to methodological aspects of the study. In your opinion the study design you chose may not be the best but you might have had to adopt it for a number of reasons. This is classified as a limitation of the study. This is also true for sampling or measurement procedures. Such limitations should be communicated to readers.

Appendix

As an appendix, in the case of quantitative studies, attach your research instrument. Also, attach a list of references in the appendix of the proposal.

Work schedule

You must set yourself dates as you need to complete the research within a certain time-frame. List the various operational steps you need to undertake and indicate against each the date by which you aim to complete that task. Remember to keep some time towards the end as a ‘cushion’ in case the research process does not go as smoothly as planned. Develop a chart as shown in Table 13.1.

TABLE 13.1 *Developing a time-frame for your study*

Tasks (Any tasks which you consider important)	To be completed by (weeks or months)														
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Proposal writing	→														
Instrument construction		→													
Data collection					→										
Coding							→								
Data analysis									→						
Report/first										→					
Report/final											→				
Typing												→			

Summary

A research proposal details the operational plan for obtaining answers to research questions. It must tell your supervisor and others what you propose to do, how you plan to proceed and why the chosen strategy has been selected. It thus assures readers of the validity of the methodology used to obtain answers accurately and objectively.

The guidelines set out in this chapter provide only a framework within which a research proposal for both quantitative and qualitative studies should be written and assume that you are reasonably well acquainted with research methodology and an academic style of writing. The contents of your proposal are arranged under the following headings: preamble/introduction, the problem, objectives of the study, hypotheses to be tested, study design, setting, measurement procedures, sampling, analysis of data, structure of the report, and problems and limitations. The specifics, under each heading, will vary with the type of study you are proposing to undertake. The write-up for qualitative studies will be based upon qualitative methodology and quantitative methodology will determine the contents of quantitative studies.

The 'preamble' or 'introduction' introduces the main area of the study. To start with, the literature review is broad and then it gradually narrows to the specific problem you are investigating. The theoretical framework should be a part of this section. The next section, 'the problem', details the specific problem under study. The research questions for which you are planning to find answers are raised in this section. 'Objectives of the study' contains your main objectives and your subobjectives. Hypotheses, if any, should be listed in the section 'hypotheses to be tested'. The logistical procedures you intend to follow are detailed under 'study design'. 'The setting' consists of a description of the organisation or community in which you plan to conduct your study. The procedure for obtaining information and the measurement of major variables are explained in the 'measurement procedures' section. You need to write about ethical issues that your study might have and how you propose to deal with them. How you will select your sample is described under 'sampling'. The procedure for data analysis is discussed under 'analysis of data'. The way you plan to structure your report is outlined under 'structure of the report'. Anticipated problems in conducting the study and limitations with its design are described under 'problems and limitations'. As an appendix to your proposal attach a copy of the research instrument and a list of the references.

A work schedule provides a time-frame for your study.

For You to Think About

- ▶ Refamiliarise yourself with the keywords listed at the beginning of this chapter and if you are uncertain about the meaning or application of any of them revisit these in the chapter before moving on.
- ▶ Compare the research proposal contents suggested in this chapter with those recommended by your university or department. If they are different, what are the differences?
- ▶ Find out the process that a research proposal goes through in your university before approval is granted.