Structuring a Research Proposal

Title

Make sure that your title goes beyond simply describing the subject matter – it should give an indication of your approach or key questions.

Overview of the research

In this section, you should provide a short overview of your research and where it fits within the existing academic discourses, debates or literature. The point is to sketch out the context into which your work will fit.

Be sure to establish a solid and convincing framework for your research in this section. This should include:

- research questions (usually, 1-3 should suffice) and the reason for asking them
- the major approach(es) you will take (conceptual, theoretical, empirical and normative, as appropriate) and rationale
- significance of the research (in academic and, if appropriate, other fields)

Positioning of the research (approx. 900 words)

- This section should discuss the texts that you believe are most important to the project, demonstrate your understanding of the research issues, and identify existing gaps (both theoretical and practical) that the research is intended to address.
- This section is intended to 'sign-post' and contextualise your research questions, not to provide a detailed analysis of existing debates.

Research design & methodology (approx. 900 words)

- This section should lay out, in clear terms, the way in which you will structure your research and the specific methods you will use.

Research design should include (but is not limited to):

- The parameters of the research (i.e. the definition of the subject matter)
- A discussion of the overall approach and your rationale for adopting this approach
- Specific aims and objectives
- A brief discussion of the timeline for achieving this

A well- developed methodology section is crucial; particularly if you intend to conduct significant empirical research- include specific techniques, not just your general approach.

References

- Your references should provide the reader with a good sense of your grasp on the literature and how you can contribute to it.
- Be sure to reference texts and resources that you think will play a large role in your analysis. It should show critical reflection in the selection of appropriate texts.

Other tips

- Make sure that your research idea, question or problem is very clearly stated, persuasive and addresses a demonstrable gap in the existing literature.
- Make sure that your proposal is well structured
- Ensure that the scope of your project is reasonable, and remember that there are significant limits to the size and complexity of a project that can be completed and written up within the proposed timeframe.
- Make sure that your passion for the subject matter shines through in the structure and arguments presented within your proposal.