

Making a Research Proposal/ Synopsis

Major Steps in a Research Process

- Explore the Topic through a background study (relevant books, articles, encyclopedias, Internet, etc). Try to understand the topic. What does it say? What are its main elements? How are they related? What is the question/s implicit in the topic? What is it that you need to do, search, or prove (or disprove)? In short, what exactly is the task?
- Review of the Literature. Identify and examine a few major studies/works on your topic. Critically assess and evaluate their arguments. See how far you agree or disagree with these arguments. Try to develop your own argument/perspective. The main purpose of the Review of the Literature is to engage with other writers on the subject to formulate and develop a line of inquiry (and rationale) for the study. There is no point in re-stating or rehashing the same old arguments in the same manner.
- Write a brief introduction, that is, few introductory paras on your topic, highlighting the nature and direction of research to follow in the paper. This should provide a basis for the formulation of your Statement of the Problem.
- Formulate a Statement of the Problem (Thesis Statement). State clearly the problem (research problem) that you want to address in your paper. This may be followed by an underlying hypothesis/question (or, may be 2 or 3 hypotheses/questions) that will help explain or understand that problem.
 - Theoretically, a Statement of the Problem helps seek/establish relationship between a dependent variable and independent variables. The Statement of the Problem is the pivot around which the whole research paper must revolve and rest. This should be the rationale and purpose of your research.
 - Make a Preliminary Outline. Divide your paper into self-contained, separate Sections and sub-Sections, if necessary. (Please don't write them „chapters“. Chapters are in books, not in papers. Papers have sections). All these Sections and sub-Sections must be sequentially and logically related to each other and, above all, to the argument/s you intend to develop with regard to your Statement of the Problem. The Outline must reflect a logical, coherent, and systematic organization of your ideas. It must be in a descriptive form. However, please do

bear in mind that it is a preliminary Outline, at this stage. It will be revised and modified into a final Outline after you have collected all the relevant data and have developed ideas further to address your Statement of the Problem critically.

- Prepare a Working Bibliography of the data/sources/material (books and articles, etc.) relevant to your research paper and within your reach at the present. This is essentially a preliminary Bibliography. Your final Bibliography, eventually, as it will appear at the end of the paper (with Second Draft), will reflect all the sources (present and subsequent) used in writing of your research paper. Obviously, that will be an expanded Bibliography.

Important Note: Review of the Literature, Statement of the Problem along with Preliminary Outline of the paper, must be submitted to the Faculty Advisors on Due Dates. These must be approved by the Advisors.

- **Collect all the relevant Data.** (College Library may not have all of it, and thus you will need to reach out). It must be reasonable both in quantity and quality for the research problem you want to analyze. It should cover all parts, that is, all Sections, sub-Sections of the paper, uniformly. There should be an internal balance within the paper.
- **Please use Note Cards for the purpose.** This is the most organized and useful method for data collection and note-taking. Each Note Card must contain one idea or one point, with proper citation of source, and page number/s. Only one side (front) of the card should be used. Cards should be 3x5 or 4x6 inches in size, and not larger. (They are available in the market, known as „Library Cards“).

There are two types of sources of data. One is called **Primary Sources**. The other is called **Secondary Sources**. Primary Sources are the preferred, original sources in research. They are original, „straight from the horse“s mouth“ kind of material, such as memoirs, diaries, letters, autobiographical/eye-witness accounts, official records (government records/public records), etc., that is, anything written, recorded, or observed by the principal actors involved in the event/s being analyzed. Secondary Sources are the material produced after the event/s and, in the main, are analyses, interpretations or statements after the event/s, and are generally covered in

books, articles (whether in journals, magazines or newspapers), etc., on the subject. Some of major sources of data, both primary and secondary, are briefly discussed here.

1. **Documents.** Documents constitute a major source of data in research, and include official records, private records, memoirs, diaries, letters, autobiographies, biographies, books, journals, magazines, newspapers, photographs, maps, pictures, audio and video recordings, tape-recorded interviews, and computerized records, etc. This kind of data is used in social science research in general and in history, political science, public policy and other related disciplines in particular.
2. **Questionnaires.** Questionnaires, in the main, are of two types. One is a Schedule type of questionnaire, essentially a face to face interview with the respondent. The other type of questionnaire is a Mailed Questionnaire. It is mailed and the respondents are asked to respond to questions given in the questionnaires. This is a cost-effective method and is used to reach a large population (through sampling). In this sense, questionnaires provide useful basis for Survey Research (mostly used in economics, sociology, and demographic studies). However, „piloting“ your questionnaire will always help. Try it on a few, select people before you mail to large numbers.
3. **Interview.** In general, there are three types of interviews, Structured, Semi-structured, and Unstructured. For structured interviews, you prepare a list of questions, and follow them with the interviewee in the same order and form as given. In the semi-structured interview, you have a list of questions or topics to cover, but you allow latitude (flexibility) to the interviewee to discuss things as he/she deems appropriate. Unstructured interviews are generally in-depth interviews, and are mostly used for life-history research. In the preparation of questions for both structured and unstructured interviews, make sure that they are short and relevant and move from the general to the particular in a logical progression with controversial, sensitive or personal issues raised towards the end of the interview. Please make sure that you develop your interview schedule carefully. Interview is a very useful support for documents (and questionnaires) in the event of paucity of sources on a particular subject.
4. **Observation.** Observation is a common method in anthropological and sociological research. It is a method used to generate data for understanding a community, culture or

social context, similar or different from that of the researcher. It could be Participant or non-Participant Observation (Observer takes no part in activities) type and could also be structured or less-structured, depending upon the need. The usual method of recording data, both verbally and non-verbally, is either during the observation or immediately thereafter, as the situation permits. But it should be done as early as possible to ensure „accuracy“ of information.

5. **Sampling.** Sampling or Survey Sampling method is used in both qualitative and quantitative types of research. Basically, there are two types of samples, Probability Samples and non-Probability Samples (some call them Purposive Samples). Probability Samples include random sampling, stratified random sampling, and cluster sampling. The most frequently used technique of non-Probability sampling is „Quota“ sample, especially in market research. Other major non-Probability method is „Opportunity“ sample, constituting a sample of the people interested in the study. A researcher must be aware of both standard errors, that is estimates of sampling error, and non-sampling error. Non-sampling error may well be due to the sampling process itself (for example, poor quality of questionnaires or interview schedules, incomplete, inaccurate, or insufficient response of the respondents). Thus, at times, it is helpful to have a large sample to neutralize the effects of non-sampling error. This is more important in quantitative or survey research.
6. **The Internet (NET).** The Internet or Net is a useful source of data collection. But please do remember that the Web is subject to copyright laws. Search Engines (like Google, Yahoo, etc) help you collect a remarkable range of information on a variety of subjects. This information is readily copiable, that is, you can copy from the source document. The problem is, and a major one too, that this easy copying has led to a devastating growth of cut and paste kind of plagiarism in research. This is highly objectionable and wrong and must be avoided at all costs.
7. Besides books and articles, information on the Net includes government and other public records, newspaper reports, individual research projects, educational and other academic, scholarly sites, which may provide relevant data for your topic. However, you must be careful in evaluating and assessing the accuracy of the information thus collected. You must be mindful of the credibility of the sites. You must also know that the

Important Note: PLAGIARISM is not confined to the use of the Net. Plagiarism, as Wikipedia describes the term, is „the unauthorized use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one’s own original work“. In other words, it could be a book, article, report, indeed anything transmitted in any form or by any means by any person. Plagiarism is „an intellectual crime“, and there are „penalties“ and „disciplinary action(s)“ for it – „against the teacher, researcher and/or staff found guilty of the offence“.

All the aforementioned tools of data collection are equally important. However, it depends upon the nature of the problem, the research problem you are trying to address. That determines the relevance and role of the tool/s you choose, that is, whether you need to use documents, questionnaires, interviews, observation, sampling, or the Net, or indeed some combination of these tools. However, it is always good to combine some of these tools. This will help you access diverse and thus more objective data for analysis.

9. Please Start writing the paper – starting with the Introduction and go on to write all your Sections and sub-Sections (minus the Conclusion). This is the first part of the step. Focus on your argument/s and develop it with the help of the data you have collected already.
10. The argument/s must come through clearly. It should not be overwhelmed by the data. More data can always be added during successive drafts.
11. Please make sure that all the ideas borrowed from others and the data used are properly cited in the footnotes/endnotes. Otherwise, it is a case of plagiarism, simple and pure. Footnotes/endnotes must follow the method given in the Turabian Manual.

In the second part of the step, revise the whole draft and then write Conclusion and Recommendations. The Conclusion is mostly an „echo“ of your introduction. Make sure that its key words or concepts complement those in your Introduction, except that your Conclusion needs to be stated more forcefully. After all, unlike the Introduction, you have the benefit of a full discussion of the problem. You can state things confidently now. If possible, call for further research to cover an area of significance in your Statement of the Problem that you could not adequately address for some reason.

In the third part of the step, revise and finalize the Introduction. Introduction is a very important part of the paper. Introduction is best finalized last so that it can provide the reader with a clear-cut, precise setting to the research problem, arguments, and findings. Remember, you wrote the Introduction earlier, at the start of your draft. But the Introduction, as it should eventually appear in the paper, should not be finalized till the Conclusion is written and the study is complete. The idea is to make sure that your Introduction is in harmony with the Conclusion and the main text of the paper. There will be no gaps, inconsistencies or self-contradictions.

In the fourth and final part of the step, check all your footnotes/endnotes very carefully. Make sure that they follow the proper method for the purpose, that is, the Turabian Manual which is discussed in detail in Section-3 of this manual. Your paper will be incomplete without footnotes/endnotes and thus will not be accepted by your Faculty Advisor. Please keep that in mind. Footnotes/Endnotes are an integral part of all drafts and final paper.

please make sure that the paper has:

- 1) conceptual clarity;
- 2) coherence and consistency in arguments;
- 3) objective empirical evidence to support the discussion;
- 4) logical flow of information and discussion between different Sections and sub-Sections of the paper;
- 5) and finally, but most importantly, the research problem, as given in the Statement of the Problem, has been sufficiently and satisfactorily dealt with, especially with regard to the hypothesis/hypotheses or questions asked. If this does not happen, the whole exercise has been largely in vain.

Add a comprehensive Bibliography at the end of the paper, after the Conclusion and Recommendations. If there are any appendices or annexes, they must follow the Conclusion and Recommendations. Nothing comes after the Bibliography. The Word Count of the paper ends with the Bibliography. The Bibliography must follow the Turabian Manual.

Also, please see that the paper doesn't suffer from the following negatives in particular:

1. inconsistencies;
2. oversimplification;
3. overgeneralization;
4. personal biases; and
5. cliches, flowery or flippant style.

Finally, please ensure that your paper is within the prescribed Word Count for the paper.