

Tips for MRP/Thesis Proposals

Purpose of a Proposal:

The purpose of the MRP/Thesis proposal is to convince your program that:

- ✓ there is a need for the research; it is significant and important;
- ✓ you are contributing something original to the field;
- ✓ the topic is feasible in terms of availability of funding, equipment, supervisors, and data;
- ✓ The research can be completed in the expected time period. Usually 15 weeks from the proposal approval for full-time candidates.
- ✓ The topic matches your interests and capabilities.

Originality:

Your work will make a worthwhile contribution to the field if it fulfils one or more of the following:

- ✓ it provides evidence to support or disprove an argument, concept, theory, or model;
- ✓ it contributes new data/information, a new improved solution, analysis procedure or research methodology;
- ✓ it results in a new or improved concept, theory or model.

The goal:

The MRP/Thesis proposal helps you focus your research, clarifies its importance and the need. It describes the methods, predicts the problems and outcomes, and plans alternatives and interventions.

How should I structure the proposal?

The following are recommended sections for your MRP/Thesis proposal. Please check with your supervisors for optional sections, variations and additional sections that may be required.

Routine Information

This can be a full cover page or a quarter page header.

- Name
- Address, telephone and email details
- Degree for which you are a candidate
- Supervisor's and co-supervisor's names
- MRP/Thesis proposal title
- Date

Statement of Topic

Introduce the audience to the general subject area and how your topic is related. Briefly point out why it is a significant topic and what contribution your work will make.

Goals of the MRP/Thesis

Set out specific objectives of the research.

Review of the literature

This, together with the following section on the theoretical orientation, will be the main substance of the proposal and will be the basis for discussions of your methods and your total research program.

The literature review should explain the relation of your topic and research goals to significant literature and recent (and current) research in your field. The form of the literature review may vary according to the nature of the field: experimental, philosophical, theoretical, comparative, etc., but its purpose will be the same in all fields.

The literature review should place your proposed research topic clearly in its relevant research context, and should demonstrate your awareness of significant similar or relevant research.

You may need to make qualitative judgments concerning the literature.

Be careful not to allow the evaluation of previous work to become a large open-ended task. You should consult with your supervisors on the types of questions you need to be asking and what boundaries you should place on your literature review. In one sense the literature review for the proposal is incomplete. You will continue to expand and update the literature as your research progresses and as you locate new publications. The final literature review will be included in your MRP/Thesis.

Ask Yourself . . .

Which pieces of research seem to have been most successful, the most promising and which less so?

What are the major lines of criticism that can be leveled at previous work?

What major omissions, gaps or neglected emphases can be identified?

Theoretical Orientation

Your aim here is to state your basic ideas on the topic.

- ✓ First, state the various theoretical approaches taken in your topic. Which one do you propose to use in your research and why? Where, tentatively do you stand on the topic?

- ✓ If there are various theories on your topic or in your field, which one(s) will you use in your conceptual framework for your MRP/Thesis?
- ✓ Which terms or trends do you wish to follow up from the literature review?
- ✓ Do you have any fresh suggestions of an explanatory, interpretative, or programmatic kind?

Methodology

Describe your proposed methods in sufficient detail so that the reader is clear about the following:

- ✓ What kind of information will you be using?
- ✓ From what sources will the information be obtained?
- ✓ What resources will you require?
- ✓ What methodology will you be using?
- ✓ Why have you selected this approach?
- ✓ What ethical and safety issues have you identified and how do you propose to proceed?

Research program timetable and milestones

This will usually be from the date you began your degree to when you expect to submit the completed

The time-line can be formatted as a table or a list. Include when you will start and finish important aspects of your research, such as: literature research, required training or attending courses, stages of experiments or investigations, beginning and completing chapters, reviews and seminars you will give, and completing the MRP/Thesis.

Tentative MRP/Thesis chapter outline

You should check with your supervisor if this is a required section of the MRP/Thesis proposal.

Present the chapter outline as a draft contents page with brief annotations of expected content or stages. Follow the standard sections relevant to your type of research. Look at past theses in your area and discuss your ideas with your supervisor.

References

List all publications cited in your proposal. Use the style recommended by the program or your supervisor.

Adapted from: *Thesis Proposals: A Brief Guide*. Written by Pam Mort for the Learning Centre, University of New South Wales © 2009.