

The research proposal

The following is adapted from chapter three of Lowe I 2007. *Textbook of research, thesis writeup, and statistics*. Centre de Publication Universitaire, Tunis. Chapter 30, Hypotheses, will also be useful as a help in narrowing down the focus of the research. Most students initially have ideas which are far too broad.

1. The objects of the research proposal are to show that:

- a. **you have found a research question**
- b. **the question is up to date**
- c. **you are up to date in the field of the research**

For instance, it is no longer allowable to say that how students learn vocabulary is a neglected area of research, even if some of the references from the 1980s say so, unless you can prove that the gap still exists, and that the neglect still continues.

- d. **you are aware of the main theoretical viewpoints** in the chosen area of research
- e. **the question can be clearly stated**
- f. **the question can be tested**, (studied, treated, elaborated) with all the limitations of working quickly, and in Tunisia
- g. **you know which methods to use**
- h. **you have clear plans for how the data will be analysed.** NB, this is an important point. Plans for data collection must go hand in hand with plans for data analysis. A common mistake is to collect data then ask how to analyse. Often, the data analysis methods will influence what kinds of data are collected and in what format.

- i. **you have an initial awareness of the implications** of what the answers to your question will be for the discipline/subject area/topic/theory

Items b. c. and d. form a brief literature review. No one is expecting you to have read all the literature and to have done all your research! A research proposal is an initial document showing that you have found an answerable question.

2. You could broadly follow, and expand upon, Swales' "Create a Research Space" model (Swales 1990, see Jordan 1997:232-3 or similar model since there are several versions of this model). Applied to proposals, rather than article introductions, this means:

- a. **State the general area of research.** Consider here one or more of the following :
 - 1) discipline
 - 2) topic
 - 3) theory/theories/viewpoints
 - 4) the leading players or authorities in the field. In all these areas you should give the main references, leaving a longer selection for the actual thesis.
- b. **Identify a gap in the knowledge**, and lead up to your research question or hypothesis.
- c. **Make proposals how you intend to fill the gap.** Here you need to state the methods you intend to use, and what you intend to do. You should also comment on the limitations of what is practical for you in your circumstances.
- d. **Give a preliminary assessment** of the likely significance of your work.
- e. **Provide a bibliography.** Ten items is adequate if these are the key references. Thirty references would be too many. Do not forget to include some references to methodology. Eg, if you refer to questionnaires, then give at least three recent references which have significant advice on writing questionnaires. You may if you wish provide two lists, <References consulted> and <References to be consulted>.

3. You must follow the normal referencing styles and conventions.

4. Length: around four good pages, typed, single spaced, large margins, in perfect English.

5. Provisional title. Keep this short. The exact title will be one of the last items to be decided upon at the end of your work.