

Research Proposal Template

The proposed research proposal should normally be between 2,500 and 4,500 words, excluding the title page, references, tables, figures, and appendices. The prescribed word ranges are indicative rather than rigid, provided that all required components are adequately addressed.

Document Specifications

- **Word limit:** 2,500–4,500 words, excluding references, tables, figures, and appendices unless otherwise specified by the University.
- **Page size:** A4, portrait orientation.
- **Margins:** 1 inch on all sides.
- **Font:** Times New Roman, 12 pt.
- **Line spacing:** 1.15
- **Text alignment:** Justified.
- **Paragraph spacing:** Consistent spacing throughout the document.
- **Citation style:** American Psychological Association, 7th edition (APA 7)/ OSCOLA/ Bluebook/ ILI.
- **File format:** Submit as a Microsoft Word document or PDF, as prescribed by the Office of Doctoral Studies.
- **Language:** Academic English with clear, precise, and grammatically correct expression.

1. Title of the Proposed Research

The title should:

- Be clear, concise, and specific.
- Reflect the subject, context, population, variables, or geographical scope of the study, where relevant.
- Avoid unnecessary abbreviations and overly broad terminology.
- Indicate the central research problem or phenomenon being investigated.

Proposed title: The title may be revised during the course of the research with the approval of the relevant authorities.

2. Background and Introduction (Approx. 300–400 words)

This section should introduce the broad research area and establish the context of the proposed study. It should explain why the topic is important and why it requires systematic investigation.

The section should include:

- A brief overview of the research context and subject area.
- The broader social, economic, technological, educational, organisational, Legal, scientific, or policy context, as applicable.
- A concise explanation of the central issue or phenomenon under investigation.
- The practical significance of the study for relevant stakeholders.
- The academic significance of the study and its connection with the discipline.
- A brief indication of the population, setting, sector, region, or institution covered by the research.
- A short concluding paragraph introducing the research problem and the need for the proposed investigation.

The introduction should lead logically to the literature review and research gap. General statements should be supported by relevant and recent scholarly sources.

3. Literature Review and Research Gap (Approx. 600–700 words)

This section should critically review the relevant scholarly literature rather than merely describing individual studies. It should demonstrate the researcher's understanding of the current state of knowledge and establish the intellectual foundation of the proposed research.

The section should include:

- A synthesis of major theoretical perspectives related to the research topic.
- Discussion of the principal concepts, constructs, variables, or themes guiding the study.
- Review of relevant empirical studies, including recent national and international research where appropriate.
- Comparison of different findings, methodologies, samples, contexts, and conclusions.
- Identification of important agreements, contradictions, limitations, and methodological weaknesses in the existing literature.
- Explanation of the theoretical framework, conceptual framework, or model proposed to guide the study.
- Identification of the unresolved research gap or gaps.

The research gap should be stated explicitly. It may relate to:

- A theoretical gap.
- An empirical gap.
- A methodological gap.
- A contextual or geographical gap.
- A population or sectoral gap.
- A policy or practice gap.
- Substantive/Legislative Gap, Doctrinal/Conceptual Gap, Empirical/Implementation Gap
- A measurement or data gap.

The section should conclude by explaining how the proposed research will address the identified gap and contribute to the existing body of knowledge.

4. Problem Statement and Research Objectives (Approx. 200–300 words)

4.1 Problem Statement

The problem statement should clearly define the issue that the research will investigate. It should explain:

- What is currently known about the problem.
- What remains unknown, inadequately explained, or insufficiently addressed.
- Why the problem requires further research.
- Who or what is affected by the problem.
- How the proposed study will respond to the identified gap.

The problem statement should be focused, researchable, and supported by evidence from the literature or relevant authoritative sources.

4.2 Research Objectives

The proposal should state one general objective and, where appropriate, three to five specific objectives.

General objective:

- To investigate/analyse/examine/evaluate [*central issue or phenomenon*] in the context of [*population, institution, sector, or location*].

Specific objectives:

1. To examine [*objective 1*].
2. To analyse [*objective 2*].
3. To assess [*objective 3*].
4. To determine [*objective 4*], if applicable.
5. To propose or develop [*objective 5*], if applicable.

4.3 Research Questions or Hypotheses

Each research question or hypothesis should correspond directly to one or more research objectives.

Research questions:

1. What is the nature and extent of [*phenomenon*]?
2. What factors influence [*dependent variable or outcome*]?
3. How does [*independent variable or intervention*] affect [*outcome*]?
4. What strategies or framework can address the identified problem?

Where the study is quantitative, testable hypotheses may be formulated.

Illustrative hypothesis format:

- **H₀:** There is no statistically significant relationship between [*independent variable*] and [*dependent variable*].
- **H₁:** There is a statistically significant relationship between [*independent variable*] and [*dependent variable*].

5. Proposed Research Methodology (Approx. 500–600 words)

This section should explain how the proposed research will be conducted and demonstrate that the study is feasible, rigorous, and ethically sound.

5.1 Research Design and Approach

Specify the overall research approach, such as:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| • Quantitative. | • Explanatory. |
| • Qualitative. | • Case study. |
| • Mixed methods. | • Comparative. |
| • Experimental or quasi-experimental. | • Longitudinal. |
| • Descriptive. | • Cross-sectional. |
| • Exploratory. | • Doctrinal |

Explain why the selected design is appropriate for answering the research questions and achieving the objectives.

The methodology should also provide an objective-wise explanation of the proposed research procedures. Each objective should be linked to:

- The type of data required.
- The source of the data.
- The method of data collection.
- The method of analysis.
- The expected output.

5.2 Study Population and Sampling

Describe:

- The target population or unit of analysis.
- The proposed study setting and geographical scope.
- The sampling frame, where applicable.
- The sampling technique, such as probability, purposive, stratified, systematic, snowball, or convenience sampling.
- The proposed sample size and justification.
- Inclusion and exclusion criteria, where relevant.

For quantitative studies, the proposal should indicate how sample size will be determined. For qualitative studies, it should explain the basis for selecting participants and the anticipated point of data saturation.

5.3 Data Sources and Collection

Identify the proposed data sources, including:

- Primary data from surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations, experiments, or assessments.
- Secondary data from government reports, institutional records, databases, archival documents, published research, or publicly available datasets.

Describe the proposed instruments and data-collection protocols. These may include:

- Structured questionnaires.
- Semi-structured interview schedules.
- Observation checklists.
- Document-analysis protocols.
- Experimental instruments.
- Standardised scales or measurement tools.

The proposal should explain procedures for pilot testing, instrument refinement, validity, reliability, trustworthiness, and data quality assurance.

5.4 Analytical Tools and Modelling

Specify the planned analytical methods and software. Depending on the research design, these may include:

- Descriptive statistics.
- Correlation and regression analysis.
- Analysis of variance.
- Structural equation modelling.
- Time-series or panel-data analysis.
- Thematic, content, or discourse analysis.
- Coding and categorisation.
- Comparative or case-based analysis.
- Mathematical, econometric, computational, or simulation models.

Potential software may include SPSS, R, Stata, Python, NVivo, ATLAS.ti, MATLAB, or other discipline-specific tools.

The proposal should explain how the selected analytical techniques will address the research questions or test the hypotheses.

5.5 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

The methodology should address:

- Informed consent.
- Confidentiality and anonymity.
- Voluntary participation.
- Data protection and secure storage.
- Permission from institutions or authorities.
- Ethical approval, where required.
- Potential risks to participants.
- Anticipated methodological or practical limitations.
- Strategies for reducing bias and improving research quality.

6. Expected Outcomes and Proposed Academic/Practical Contributions (Approx. 200 words)

This section should state what the study is expected to produce and how it may contribute to knowledge, policy, professional practice, or society.

Expected outcomes may include:

- A new theoretical interpretation or conceptual framework.
- Empirical evidence concerning the selected problem or population.
- Identification of significant relationships, patterns, causes, or mechanisms.
- Development or validation of a model, instrument, intervention, or framework.
- Recommendations for policy, institutional planning, management, education, industry, or community practice.
- Improved understanding of an under-researched context.
- Publications, datasets, tools, or other scholarly outputs.

The proposal should distinguish between:

- **Academic contributions:** theoretical development, methodological advancement, new empirical evidence, or refinement of existing concepts.
- **Practical contributions:** operational recommendations, policy implications, implementation strategies, decision-support tools, or improvements in professional practice.

Expected outcomes should remain realistic and should be directly connected to the research objectives and methodology.

7. Proposed Chapter Outline and Timeline (Approx. 150 words, excluding the timeline table)

7.1 Tentative Chapter Outline

A tentative thesis structure may include:

1. **Introduction:** Research background, problem statement, objectives, questions, scope, and significance.
2. **Literature Review:** Theoretical foundations, empirical studies, conceptual framework, and research gap.

3. **Research Methodology:** Design, population, sampling, instruments, data collection, analysis, ethics, and limitations.
4. **Results or Findings:** Presentation and analysis of the collected data.
5. **Discussion:** Interpretation of findings in relation to the literature and theoretical framework.
6. **Conclusions and Recommendations:** Conclusions, contributions, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

The final chapter structure may be revised in consultation with the supervisor and doctoral research committee.

7.2 Tentative Three-Year Research Timeline

Activity	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Topic refinement and proposal development	Months 1–3	—	—
Literature review and framework development	Months 1–9	—	—
Proposal defence and ethical approval	Months 6–9	—	—
Instrument development and pilot study	Months 8–12	—	—
Data collection	—	Months 1–6	—
Data processing and analysis	—	Months 4–9	—
Conference papers and journal manuscripts	—	Months 7–12	Months 1–4
Thesis chapter drafting	—	Months 8–12	Months 1–6
Revision and supervisor review	—	—	Months 5–9
Final submission and viva preparation	—	—	Months 9–12

The timeline should be adapted to the requirements of the discipline, research design, data-access arrangements, and institutional regulations.

8. References

Provide a complete list of all sources cited in the proposal using **APA 7th edition** / **OSCOLA** / **Bluebook** / **ILI**.

The reference list should:

- Include only works cited in the proposal.
- Use recent, credible, and relevant scholarly sources.
- Include foundational theoretical works where necessary.
- Include peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, government publications, and authoritative reports as appropriate.
- Apply consistent formatting to authors, dates, titles, journal names, volume and issue numbers, page ranges, and DOIs or URLs.
- Use hanging indentation and alphabetical ordering by the surname of the first author.
- Ensure that every in-text citation appears in the reference list and every listed reference is cited in the text.