

# Some Dissertation Proposal Ideas

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- I. In general the dissertation proposal ...
  - A. Builds upon the idea paper
    1. Idea paper sections that can remain largely unchanged
      - a) Problem Statement and Goal
      - b) Relevance and Significance
        - (1) Do not include the material from the Brief Review of the Literature
        - (2) Similar to the Relevance and Significance section from the idea paper
      - c) Barriers and Issues
      - d) Resources
    2. Idea paper sections requiring significant enhancement
      - a) Review of the Literature – place in separate chapter (Chapter 2)
      - b) Approach – place in a separate chapter (Chapter 3: Methodology)
  - B. Should ...
    1. Represent thorough research – usually in excess of 100 references
    2. Completely describe the study being proposed
  - C. Be scholarly
    1. Support statements of fact with citations from appropriate literature
    2. Clearly distinguish between facts and theories/opinions/beliefs/aspirations
    3. No grammatical errors
    4. No format errors
- II. Chapter 1: Introduction
  - A. Problem Statement and Goal
    1. Same scope as described for the idea paper
    2. As your research progresses, you might find that either the problem or the goal changes
      - a) If so, be sure to make the necessary changes in your Problem Statement and Goals section to reflect the true direction your study will follow
      - b) If you see significant changes in the direction of your study, you might have to submit a revised idea paper. I'll let you know if I feel this action is necessary.
  - B. Relevance and Significance
    1. Same scope as described for the idea
    2. As your research progresses, you might find that either the problem or the goal changes
      - a) If so, be sure to make the necessary changes in your Relevance and Significance subsection to reflect the true direction your study will follow

- b) If you see significant changes in the direction of your study, you might have to submit a revised idea paper. I'll let you know if I feel this action is necessary.
- C. Barriers and Issues
- 1. Same scope as described for the idea paper
  - 2. As your research progresses, you might find that either the problem or the goal changes
    - a) If so, be sure to make the necessary changes in your Barriers and Issues section to reflect the true direction your study will follow
    - b) If you see significant changes in the direction of your study, you might have to submit a revised idea paper. I'll let you know if I feel this action is necessary.
- D. Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations
- 1. Nature of this section entirely dependent on the nature of the study being proposed
    - a) Experimental
    - b) Descriptive
    - c) Developmental
    - d) etc.
  - 2. Assumptions
    - a) Something taken for granted or accepted as true without proof; a supposition
    - b) Examples
      - (1) Participants in the study will make a sincere effort to complete the assigned tasks
      - (2) The students participating in the Internet-based course have a basic familiarity with the personal computer and the use of the World Wide Web.
  - 3. Limitations
    - a) Factors beyond the researchers control that potentially impact the internal validity of the study
    - b) Examples
      - (1) All subjects in the study will be volunteers who may withdraw from the study at any time. The participants who finish the study might not, therefore, be truly representative of the population.
      - (2) The members of the expert panel that will validate the proficiency survey will be drawn from the faculty of ... and may not truly represent universally accepted expert opinion.
  - 4. Delimitations
    - a) Factors that the researcher intentionally impose to constrain the scope of the study to make it more manageable.
    - b) Delimitations impact the generalizability of the results of the study.
    - c) Example: The participants in the study will be drawn from a private, urban, two-year college that features as one of its strongest attractions small class size and close personal attention.

Generalization of the results to other student populations may be of limited value.

- E. Definition of Terms
  - 1. Use full sentences in the definition
  - 2. Support the definition with a citation or two
  - 3. Provide enough discussion in the definition to make it meaningful; a single sentence is usually not enough discussion.
    - a) If the term is that easily defined, it probably does not need to appear in the definition of terms.
    - b) You only need to define terms over which there might be misunderstanding.

- F. Summary
  - 1. Restate
    - a) Problem being addressed
    - b) Goals for the study
    - c) Do not introduce any new material
  - 2. Introduce what will be covered in the rest of the document

### III. Chapter 2: Review of the Literature (RoL)

- A. In general, the RoL should clearly demonstrate a thorough understanding of the previous research that is applicable to the proposed study.
- B. The RoL serves as the foundation upon which the study will be built, so it is essential that you demonstrate a thorough mastery of the germane literature by:
  - 1. Analyzing the topic you are researching and developing a logical, well structured discussion of all important aspects of the topic
  - 2. Synthesizing the literature into a flowing narrative in which you seamlessly incorporate the works of others into a whole that is indeed greater than the sum of its parts
  - 3. Evaluating the literature to demonstrate that you can clearly distinguish among theory, opinion, anecdotal studies, and solid experimental research.
- C. Limit your review to “appropriate” sources
  - 1. Current
    - a) For many technical topics, current could well mean within the previous two or three years
    - b) For non-technical topics (i.e. learning theory), classical references might be very applicable
  - 2. Validated
    - a) Articles from peer-reviewed journals
    - b) Articles from peer-reviewed conference proceedings
    - c) Books
    - d) *Not* Web sites

### IV. Chapter 3: Methodology

- A. This section requires significant enhancement over the scope described for the Approach section in the idea paper
- B. Detailed, step-by-step description of how the study will be conducted, answering

1. Hypotheses to be tested
    - a) Not all study types require hypotheses (i.e. not applicable to a developmental study)
    - b) Directly tied to the research question(s) identified in the goals section
    - c) Generally speaking, yes/no questions
  2. What is going to be done
  3. Who is going to do each thing to be done
  4. How will each thing to be done be done
  5. When, and in what order, will the things be accomplished actually be done
  6. Where will those things be done
  7. Why – supported by the literature – for the answers to the What, Who, How, When, and Where
- C. The reader should be able to conduct the study you are proposing based upon the methodology you outline.
- D. Tied to the research questions and, when present, hypotheses
1. Following the methodology must clearly test the hypotheses
  2. Following the methodology must offer the potential to answer the research questions
- E. As your research progresses, you might find that either the problem or the goal changes
1. If so, be sure to make the necessary changes in your Methodology section to reflect the true direction your study will follow
  2. If you see significant changes in the direction of your study, you might have to submit a revised idea paper. I'll let you know if I feel this action is necessary.
- F. Resources
1. Same scope as described for the idea paper
  2. As your research progresses, you might find that either the problem or the goal changes
    - a) If so, be sure to make the necessary changes in your Resources section to reflect the true direction your study will follow
    - b) If you see significant changes in the direction of your study, you might have to submit a revised idea paper. I'll let you know if I feel this action is necessary.
- G. Milestones
1. New section for the preliminary proposal
  2. Essential a project management instrument
    - a) Identify the critical points for your dissertation development.
    - b) Do not confuse these steps with the steps I mentioned in reference to the Approach section.
      - (1) In the Approach section you discuss only the steps you will follow in conducting your experiment, developing your product, etc.

- (2) In this section, you discuss the steps necessary to complete the dissertation.
  3. You may use an accepted project management tool for this section, if you desire
    - a) Gantt Chart
    - b) PERT Chart
- V. Appendices
  - A. Be sure to reference each appendix in the body of your paper
  - B. List the appendices in the order in which they are cited in the paper
  - C. Include material of interest by not primary importance to the proposed study
    1. Test instruments developed
    2. Letters
    3. Qualifications of committee members
- VI. References
  1. List only works cited in the text of the paper
  2. Follow GSICS Dissertation Guide and APA Publication Manual (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.) format guidelines