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RESEARCH PROPOSAL
WRITING TEMPLATE & GUIDE

*A chapter-by-chapter guide to structuring and writing an
academic research proposal (BA / MBA / MA level)*

Structure modelled on an approved postgraduate research
proposal

How to Use This Guide?

This guide breaks down a standard academic research proposal into its chapters and sub-sections, based on the format used and approved for postgraduate (MBA) research at Queens' College. For each section it explains the purpose of that part of the proposal, exactly what content belongs there, practical tips for writing it, and a short real-world example drawn from an approved proposal on "The Impact of Leadership Style on Organizational Performance."

A typical proposal following this structure has four chapters plus a reference list:

- Chapter One – Introduction
- Chapter Two – Literature Review
- Chapter Three – Research Methodology
- Chapter Four – Time and Cost Budget
- References

Use the template as a checklist: work through each numbered sub-section in order, replace the guidance with your own study's content, and remove the italic guidance text once your version is complete. Before final submission, share the completed draft with your advisor for review, comments, and formal approval most institutions require the advisor's signature on the cover page before the proposal can be submitted to the School of Postgraduate Studies.

Preliminary Pages

Cover / Title Page

What this section is for

Identifies the study, the author, and the academic context at a glance – it is the first thing your advisor and evaluators see.

What to include

- Institution name and logo
- Full title of the study, written in capital letters, phrased as a statement of what is being investigated and where (e.g., "THE IMPACT OF [X] ON [Y] IN THE CASE OF [ORGANIZATION], [LOCATION]")
- Prepared by: student's full name and ID/registration number
- Advisor's name and title (e.g., "Advisor: [Name] (Dr)")
- A statement that the proposal is submitted in partial fulfilment of the relevant degree
- Submission month/year and place

How to write it well

- Keep the title under ~20 words; it should name the independent variable(s), the dependent variable, and the case/organization studied
- Use a consistent, formal font and center-align all text
- Double-check the exact wording your school requires for the submission statement

Example from a real proposal: "THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP STYLE ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN THE CASE OF [company], [cite, country]" prepared by -----, Advisor: -----), submitted to -----, month year.

Table of Contents

What this section is for

Gives readers (especially your advisor) a map of the document and the page number of every chapter and sub-section.

What to include

- All chapter titles and numbered sub-headings, exactly as they appear in the body
- Page numbers for each entry, right-aligned
- A separate list of references / appendices if applicable

How to write it well

- Generate it automatically from your word processor's heading styles rather than typing it manually – this keeps page numbers accurate as you edit
- Update the table of contents last, after the whole proposal is finalized

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Chapter One orients the reader to the topic. It moves from a broad discussion of the subject to a specific, well-justified research problem, and closes with the questions, objectives, and boundaries of the study. Every sub-section below should logically build on the one before it.

1.1 Background of the Study

What this section is for

Introduces the general subject area and shows the reader why it matters, before narrowing down toward your specific problem.

What to include

- A general introduction to the core concept(s) of the study (e.g., leadership, organizational performance)
- Why this concept is important to organizations or the sector you are studying
- A brief mention of relevant theories or scholarly perspectives
- A narrowing statement that connects the general topic to the specific sector/industry/organization you will study

How to write it well

- Write from general to specific start with the broad concept, end with your case organization
- Support key claims with citations to established authors, even in the background section
- Keep it to roughly 1–1.5 pages; save the detailed theory for Chapter Two

Example from a real proposal: *The sample proposal opens by explaining how transformational leadership increases group members' motivation and confidence, then explains how leadership style affects employee performance broadly, before narrowing toward the banking sector and Ethiopia specifically.*

1.2 Statement of the Problem

What this section is for

States, precisely, the gap or issue your research will address this is the core justification for the entire study.

What to include

- A clear definition of the central problem, supported by citations
- Evidence that the problem exists and matters (statistics, prior findings, observed practice)
- An explicit statement of the research gap what previous studies have NOT covered
- A closing sentence stating what this specific study will do to address the gap

How to write it well

- Be specific about geography, sector, and organization a vague problem statement weakens the whole proposal
- Explicitly name the gap: e.g., "there are limited studies... and none of them studied [Organization]"

- End the section with one sentence that mirrors your title, e.g., "This research will assess..."

Example from a real proposal: *The sample proposal notes that limited studies exist on leadership style and organizational performance in Ethiopian banks, and that none had studied Addis Bank specifically this becomes the stated gap the research fills.*

1.3 Basic Research Questions

What this section is for

Translates the problem statement into the specific questions your data collection and analysis will answer.

What to include

- One question per independent variable or theme in your conceptual framework
- Questions phrased so they can realistically be answered with the data you plan to collect

How to write it well

- Number each question and phrase them consistently (e.g., all starting with "What is the effect of..." or "To what extent does...")
- Make sure every research question has a matching specific objective in section 1.4

Example from a real proposal: *"1. What is the effect of transformational leadership on organizational performance? 2. To what extent does authoritarian leadership influence organizational performance?" one question per leadership style studied.*

1.4 Objectives of the Study

What this section is for

States what the research intends to achieve, split into one overarching goal and several measurable sub-goals.

What to include

- 1.4.1 General Objective a single, broad sentence describing the overall purpose of the study
- 1.4.2 Specific Objectives a numbered list, each one mapping directly onto a research question

How to write it well

- Use action verbs for specific objectives: "to identify," "to examine," "to assess," "to determine"
- Keep the general objective to one sentence; keep specific objectives parallel in structure

Example from a real proposal: *General Objective: "to determine the impact of leadership on the organizational performance of Addis Bank." Specific objectives then examine each leadership style (transformational, authoritarian, ethical, delegative) in turn.*

1.5 Significance of the Study

What this section is for

Explains who benefits from the research and how this is where you make the case for why the study is worth doing.

What to include

- Practical benefit to the organization/industry studied
- Contribution to management or policy decisions
- Value as reference material for future researchers or students

How to write it well

- Name concrete audiences (e.g., bank management, policymakers, future researchers) rather than saying "it will be useful to everyone"
- Keep this section to one focused paragraph

1.6 Scope of the Study***What this section is for***

Defines the boundaries of the research what is covered and what is not so readers know how to interpret the findings.

What to include

- The variables covered (list them)
- The population/respondents targeted
- The geographic area and organization(s) covered
- The time period the study is limited to (cross-sectional vs. longitudinal)

How to write it well

- Be explicit about what is deliberately excluded this pre-empts criticism during defence
- Keep language factual and brief; save justification of methodology choices for Chapter Three

1.7 Limitations of the Study***What this section is for***

Acknowledges constraints on the research honestly, showing methodological awareness.

What to include

- Practical constraints (time, budget, access to branches/sites, sample coverage etc)
- How each limitation affects the generalizability of the findings?
- A note on how future researchers might address the same limitation

How to write it well

- Frame limitations as opportunities for future research, not as weaknesses that undermine the study
- Keep this short two to four sentences are typical for a proposal

1.8 Organization of the Paper***What this section is for***

Gives the reader a short roadmap of how the rest of the document (all five eventual chapters of the final thesis) is structured.

What to include

- One sentence per chapter, summarizing its contents

- Confirmation of the total number of chapters in the final research paper

How to write it well

- Write this section last, after the rest of the proposal is finalized, so the summary matches the actual content

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Two situates your study within existing knowledge. It should move from theory (what concepts and models exist) to empirical evidence (what other researchers have actually found) to your own framework (how you will study the problem).

Introduction

What this section is for

A short paragraph previewing what the chapter will cover.

What to include

- One or two sentences listing the sub-sections that follow (theoretical review, empirical review, conceptual framework)

2.1 Theoretical Literature Review

What this section is for

Defines and discusses the key concepts, theories, and models underpinning your study, using citations from established scholars.

What to include

- Definitions of the central concept (e.g., leadership) with more than one scholarly perspective
- A sub-section defining and discussing EACH independent variable in your conceptual framework
- A sub-section defining and discussing the dependent variable
- A discussion of the theoretical relationship between the independent and dependent variables

How to write it well

- Give each key variable its own clearly labelled sub-heading (as in the sample: Authoritarian Leadership, Delegative Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Ethical Leadership, Organizational Performance)
- Cite every definition and claim theoretical review should read as a synthesis of scholars' views, not personal opinion
- End with a paragraph that explicitly links leadership style (or your IVs) to organizational performance (or your DV)

Example from a real proposal: *The sample proposal defines leadership generally, then devotes a labeled sub-section to each of the four styles studied (Authoritarian, Delegative, Transformational, Ethical) before defining organizational performance and discussing the theoretical link between style and performance.*

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

What this section is for

Summarizes what previous studies have actually found when they investigated similar research questions, using real data.

What to include

- A short summary of each prior study: where it was conducted, its design/methodology, sample size, and key findings
- A range of studies ideally from your own country/sector as well as international contexts
- A closing observation about what these studies collectively show

How to write it well

- Organize studies logically e.g., by geography, by variable, or chronologically
- For each study, briefly state design, sample, and finding avoid simply listing titles
- Prefer recent, credible sources (peer-reviewed journals, theses, reputable reports)

Example from a real proposal: *The sample reviews four prior studies from Addis Ababa Police Commission, a Nigerian study on leadership styles, a Coca-Cola Abuja study, and a meta-analysis of 270 studies each summarized by design, sample size, and key finding.*

2.3 Summary of Literature and Research Gaps

What this section is for

Draws the theoretical and empirical review together and restates, more specifically now, the gap your study will fill.

What to include

- A brief synthesis of what the literature agrees on
- An explicit statement of what has NOT been studied, especially in your specific country/sector/organization
- A closing sentence connecting this gap to your study's objectives

2.4 Conceptual Framework

What this section is for

Visually and textually shows the relationship between your independent and dependent variables, guiding your data analysis in Chapter Four of the final paper.

What to include

- A short paragraph explaining what a conceptual framework is and its purpose in the study
- A diagram (boxes and arrows) showing each independent variable pointing toward the dependent variable
- Attribution if the framework is adapted from another author's model

How to write it well

- Keep the diagram simple: one box per variable, arrows showing the hypothesized direction of influence

- Make sure every variable in the diagram also appears in your research questions and objectives

Example from a real proposal: The sample framework shows four independent variables Transformational, Delegative, Ethical, and Authoritarian Leadership each with an arrow pointing to the single dependent variable, Organizational Performance, adapted from Abdul, Veronica & Zubair (2017).

Chapter 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter Three explains exactly how the research will be carried out, in enough detail that another researcher could replicate it. It covers design, population, sampling, data, instruments, analysis techniques, and ethics.

Introduction

What this section is for

Briefly states the organization being studied and previews the methodological choices covered in the chapter.

What to include

- A sentence or two describing the study area/organization
- A preview of the sampling technique and data collection approach used

3.1 Research Design

What this section is for

States and justifies the overall research design/strategy that will guide data collection and analysis.

What to include

- The type(s) of design used (e.g., descriptive, explanatory, exploratory) with a brief definition of each
- A justification for why this design fits your research questions
- A restatement of the independent and dependent variables

How to write it well

- Cite a methodology textbook or scholar when defining design types
- Explain WHY you chose this design, not just what it is e.g., descriptive to describe the effect, explanatory to test the relationship between variables

3.2 Target Population

What this section is for

Defines exactly who the respondents of the study are and how large that group is.

What to include

- A definition of "population" in the research context
- The specific population for this study (organization, department, location)
- The total number of people in that population, with the source of that figure

How to write it well

- Cite the internal source of your population figure (e.g., HR department records) for credibility

Example from a real proposal: *The sample proposal defines the target population as the 2,396 professional employees of Addis Bank working in the Addis Ababa district offices and head office, citing the bank's HR department as the source.*

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques**What this section is for**

Explains how many respondents will actually be surveyed and how they will be selected from the wider population.

What to include

- 3.3.1 Sample Size the formula used (e.g., Yamane, 1967), the calculation shown step-by-step, and the final sample size
- 3.3.2 Sampling Technique whether random or non-random sampling is used, and the specific technique (e.g., stratified random sampling) with justification

How to write it well

- Always show the full formula and substitute your own numbers into it do not just state the final figure
- State your confidence level and margin of error explicitly (commonly 95% and 5%)
- Explain how strata are defined if using stratified sampling (e.g., by department)

Example from a real proposal: *Using Yamane's (1967) formula with $N = 2,396$ and a 5% margin of error, the sample proposal calculates a sample size of 343 employees, selected via stratified random sampling by department.*

3.4 Types and Source of Data**What this section is for**

Clarifies what kind of data will be collected (quantitative/qualitative) and where it will come from (primary/secondary).

What to include

- 3.4.1 Types of Data quantitative and/or qualitative, with a brief definition of each and which scale (e.g., 5-point Likert scale) will be used
- 3.4.2 Source of Data primary data (collected directly from respondents) and secondary data (journals, reports, prior research) with definitions

How to write it well

- If using a Likert scale, state the number of points and the anchor labels (e.g., Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)
- Mention if the instrument will be translated into a local language for respondents

3.5 Data Collection Instrument**What this section is for**

Describes the tool used to gather primary data and how it was developed.

What to include

- Confirmation that a questionnaire (or interview guide, etc.) is the primary tool
- A note on how the instrument was developed (e.g., adapted from reviewed literature)

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

What this section is for

Explains the practical steps for administering the instrument to respondents.

What to include

- Who the questionnaire will be distributed to
- How it will be distributed (in person, online, etc.) and over what timeframe
- How it relates back to the sampling technique described earlier

3.7 Data Analysis and Presentation

What this section is for

Describes exactly how the collected data will be processed and analyzed to answer the research questions.

What to include

- 3.7.1 Descriptive analysis frequency, percentage, mean, mode, standard deviation, etc.
- 3.7.2 Pearson Correlation analysis for testing the strength/direction of relationships between variables
- 3.7.3 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis for testing the combined explanatory power of independent variables on the dependent variable
- The statistical software to be used (e.g., SPSS) and version number

How to write it well

- Briefly define each technique and why it fits your data type and research questions
- State your confidence interval for hypothesis testing (commonly 95%)

3.8 Validity

What this section is for

Explains how you will ensure the instrument actually measures what it is intended to measure.

What to include

- A definition of validity in the research context
- Steps taken to strengthen validity (e.g., adopting pre-tested questions from prior studies, expert/advisor review)

3.9 Reliability

What this section is for

Explains how you will ensure the instrument produces consistent results.

What to include

- A definition of reliability
- The statistical test used to check internal consistency (commonly Cronbach's Alpha) and the acceptable threshold (e.g., 0.6–0.9)

3.10 Ethical Considerations

What this section is for

Shows that the research will be conducted responsibly and with respect for participants' rights.

What to include

- Informed consent respondents understand the purpose of the study
- Voluntary participation and the right to withdraw without penalty
- Confidentiality and anonymity of responses

Chapter 4: TIME AND COST BUDGET

4.1 Budget

What this section is for

Itemizes the expected costs of carrying out the research, demonstrating that the study is financially planned and feasible.

What to include

- Material resources/supplies (stationery, photocopying, printing, communication costs)
- Manpower/personnel costs (e.g., typing/data entry support)
- Administrative costs
- Transportation costs for data collection
- Miscellaneous/contingency costs
- A total cost figure, in local currency

How to write it well

- Present the budget as a simple table: expense category, item, and amount
- Include a small miscellaneous line item to cover unforeseen costs

4.2 Work Plan and Timetable

What this section is for

Shows the schedule for completing each stage of the research, demonstrating the study can realistically be finished within the required timeframe.

What to include

- A table listing each research activity as a row (problem identification, literature review, proposal preparation, data collection, data analysis, write-up, editing/finalizing)
- Columns for each month/week of the research period, with the planned activity marked

How to write it well

- Keep activities in logical sequence and allow some overlap (e.g., literature review can continue into the data collection phase)
- Match the total timeframe to your institution's requirement (often 3–4 months for a proposal-to-defense cycle)

References

Reference List

What this section is for

Lists every source cited in the proposal in a consistent academic format, allowing readers to trace your claims back to their origin.

What to include

- Every in-text citation must have a matching entry here, and vice versa
- Author surname(s), initials, year of publication, title, and source (journal/publisher)

How to write it well

- Use one citation style consistently throughout (commonly APA for business research) check your institution's required style
- Order entries alphabetically by first author's surname
- Include journal articles, books, and prior theses/dissertations you drew on for both the theoretical and empirical review

Final Checklist Before Submission to Advisor

Run through this list before sending the completed proposal for advisor review and approval.

Item	Done
Cover page complete with title, name, ID, advisor name	☐
Table of contents generated and page numbers correct	☐
1.1–1.8: Introduction chapter complete	☐
2.1–2.4: Literature review complete with conceptual framework diagram	☐
3.1–3.10: Methodology chapter complete, sample size calculation shown	☐
4.1–4.2: Budget and work plan tables complete	☐
All in-text citations have matching reference list entries	☐
Proposal proofread for spelling, grammar, and consistent formatting	☐
Reviewed and approved by advisor (signature obtained)	☐