

47.269 Research I: Basics
Checklist for Final Research Proposals

General

- Is your study an EXPERIMENT (random assignment, control of conditions including appropriate counterbalancing, manipulation of the independent variable)?
- Are all references in text—and only references cited in the text—also cited in reference section using complete APA style, including as appropriate for electronic sources?
- Are all sources appropriate for inclusion—empirical or theoretical papers from scholarly journals or texts?
- Is text arranged in APA style, including title page, running head, and use of headings?

Abstract

- Is your abstract on a separate page from the title and the body of your paper?
- Does your abstract provide a brief (125 words or less) synopsis of the study you are proposing?

Introduction—primarily written in past tense since you are talking about studies that have been done.

- Do you describe the literature in past tense since these are studies already done and conclusions already reached?
- Do you use no more than one direct quote? (Be sure to include page numbers.)
- Are assertions backed up with research and citations rather than broad sweeping generalizations or opinions?
- When you cite previous studies, do you say enough about what they found and how so that your reader can make a judgement about how it fits in with

your work (not just their conclusions, but what evidence—data, results—the conclusions were based)? Explain. Provide operational definitions.

- Do you have minimally 4-7 citations (with at least 4 empirical journal articles) that *provide a rationale* for the study you are proposing?
- Do you tie your introduction together with the results of research that you are citing, rather than just listing study after study after study?
- Does the previous research you cite lead to the research question posed by the current study (that is, the study you are proposing)? Note that here you begin to shift to future tense (e.g., “Therefore, the proposed study will examine the effects of....”).
- Do you end with a clear statement of the hypothesis or hypotheses for the current study?

Methods—all written in future tense since you are proposing the study

Participants

- Do you describe who your participants will be with respect to the demographic characteristics that matter for your study?
- Do you identify the source for any data that you plan to use in ascertaining who should comprise your sample (e.g., data from the US Census or UMass Lowell Office for Institutional Research)? Give complete citations.
- Do you provide a target N and clearly identify your sampling units if they are other than individuals (neighborhoods, for example)?
- Do you use real data for relevant information?
- Do you describe and justify your sampling method and size?

Materials or Apparatus

- Do you give complete citations for tests or questionnaires that you are using from journal articles or other published sources?
- Do you describe what each test or questionnaire is designed to do and how it does it (e.g., Likert scales, adjective checklists, etc.)?

- Do you report psychometric data on tests or measures you might use (test-retest reliability coefficients, for example)?
- If you are choosing items to create tests or assessments of, for example, word learning, do you indicate what constraints you are putting on the words so that extraneous factors (e.g., frequency of usage or type of word) are held constant across conditions?
- How will you ensure the psychometric properties (reliability and validity) of your own homegrown survey or questionnaire? (pre-test, pilot test)
- If you are developing stimuli (e.g., written scenarios or videotapes) for an experiment, do you say how you know they will present what you intend them to present (manipulation checks) and how extraneous variables will be (a) held constant or (b) counterbalanced?
- Do you know exactly what kind of score each measure will provide for each participant?

Procedure

- Do you indicate that informed consent will be obtained prior to participation?
- Is it clear whether this is a between or within subjects design? If there are two factors, one between and one within, is it clear which is which?
- If you have a two group experiment, is it clear what aspects of the procedures vary between groups and which are the same for everyone (e.g., "All participants will be asked to Half of the participants will then... and half will ... Finally all participants will be asked to....")?
- If you have tasks such as memorizing words or reading news articles, have you specified how long the exposure and retrieval period will be, how many words participants are exposed to at once, how many total trials (e.g., 10 trials of 10 words each for a total of 100 words) how they are responding (free recall as in "Write down as many words as you remember" vs. recognition as in "Circle the words below that you saw earlier.")
- Do you specify counterbalancing (e.g., for order of presentation, assignment of gender to main character across stories, etc.) for experimental designs?
- Is the relevance of all the procedures you describe clear from the introduction (i.e., are there no surprises)?

- Is it clear exactly what the data will be, i.e., what score(s) each participant will have at the conclusion of the study?
- Do you describe debriefing if used?
- Could someone else take over for you in administering your study based on what you have written (and will someone else be able to replicate)?

Results (In your proposal, call this the Data Analysis Plan)

- Have you stated exactly what data you will be analyzing (e.g., test scores, weight before and after, number of words correctly recalled, etc.)?
- Have you identified exactly what statistical tests you will conduct?
- Do you state your anticipated results in both a statistical sentence and an interpretation in English. [Nevermind this one—you will learn to do this in Research II and you will need to do it in Research III.]*
- Is it clear that your statistical tests are tied to your hypotheses?

Discussion

- Do you interpret what the likely outcomes will mean?
- Do you indicate what limitations there will be to the study?
- Do you suggest what the next steps will be, i.e., follow up research?

References

- Begin on a separate page and titles References?
- At margin for first line and indented for subsequent lines?
- Double spaced?
- APA style exactly?
- Do you use only those references you have cited in the body of your paper?