

5.2 Structure of Assignment

5.2.1 Option A : Research Proposal for Primary Data collection

The following guidance notes are intended to give you a clear idea of what should be included in your proposal. A proposal is written in a report style, **not** an essay, and **not** one free flowing piece of text. This assignment, although requiring a greater degree of critical reflection than the average research proposal, largely follows this structure. It is therefore suggested that when writing your proposal you should use headings such as those listed below.

Title

This is the name given to your research proposal and needs to reflect the substance of your research plan. For example, if you were interested in knowing about the effectiveness of a drug prevention programme your research title may be 'A *proposal to evaluate the effectiveness of group work in preventing drug use among drug abusers aged 18-25.*' Or you may wish to identify a specific research question i.e. "*Is group work more effective than individual counselling in preventing drug misuse among drug abusers aged 18-25?*"

Although you will be anxious to complete your assignment take some time to think carefully (and refine) your research question. This is a very important part of the research process.

Abstract

Your abstract should be a concise summary of your proposal, yet it must also be comprehensive enough for the reader to gain an understanding of the proposed project. You may wish to begin with a general statement about the research problem the proposal seeks to address and then summarise the importance of the problem, the methodology you intend using together with a brief description of the data collection tools. The abstract should also include a brief description of your sampling methods together with the sample size. The length of the abstract should be between 100-250 words, which are **not** included in the total word count.

Introduction (*rationale for proposed study*)

In this section you will need to provide the reader with the context to your research including the reason why you think the research should be undertaken. These reasons are likely to be work related but you will also need to place the research problem within a wider socio-political context. Some discussion of how you envisage your research being used in terms of developing policy and practice within your area of work should also be included in this section. For example, if you were proposing to carry out research on drug abusers you may wish to use the results to develop more effective treatment programmes. Before writing this section you should carefully considered some of the following question:

- What is the context of your research question/problem?
- What have others said about your research question/problem? - this section does not include your literature review but you may find it useful to refer to one or two sources which have helped you to identify your research question.
- Where, when and who are you studying? (Your research population – this is normally interpreted as people, but could be documentary sources or types of equipment).
- Is your research question identified as an issue within contemporary policy and practice developments?
- How will your research help to improve practice?
- State clearly the aim (general statement of intent) and objectives (specific issues to be addressed) of the proposed study.
- State clearly the research question.

Literature Review

Reviewing and evaluating research literature is central to the research process and in this section you will be discussing articles and books that are most relevant to your research question. A good literature review is far more than a critical appraisal of a series of articles; it should create a structure in which you legitimise carrying out your proposed study. You should consider some of the following questions in reviewing relevant literature:

- How was the literature search process conducted?
- What are the main theoretical perspectives contained within the literature?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the literature you have reviewed?
- What are the similarities and differences in the literature?
- Are there any inconsistencies in the literature?
- Are there any gaps in the literature, which your research would be addressing?
- Have you identified the interrelationships between previous literature and your proposed study?
- Have you justified any constraints in the review of the literature?

Remember that in this section you need to convince the reader that your research is worth doing. Your review will also need to be coherent so think carefully about how you wish to organise your discussion/critique of the relevant literature as well as developing your rationale for carrying out the study.

Please note:

Comment on literature relevant to your research topic and your choice of issue to investigate. If there is no literature on this area, you will need to defend this statement or make comparisons to related subject areas. However, *do not write a general review of literature in your discipline* and write concisely.

Methodology

In this section you need to carefully consider the different research paradigms. Research design involves more than a description of your methodology. You have to show that you have an understanding of the overall research approaches. Your choice and defence of a particular methodology must be based on an epistemology (theory of knowledge) relevant to your research question, rather than personal choice. There is never only one way to study a research question so you must critically analyse philosophies underpinning qualitative and quantitative approaches to justify the appropriateness of your chosen methodology.

- What research paradigm is most appropriate and why have you chosen this particular paradigm?

Research Design

A research design is a research plan which ensures that the evidence obtained enables you to answer the research question as unambiguously as possible. After you have established the appropriate methodology, the research design flows from this, where issues of sampling, data collection methods (e.g. questionnaire, observation, interview, document analysis) are all subsidiary to the matter of ‘What evidence do I need to collect?’

In this section you must consider:

- Which **research design** are you using and why? (e.g. experimental, survey, ethnography).
- How are you going to operationalise your research question? E.g. if you were doing a study on the prevention of drug abuse, how are you going to measure drug abuse?

Listed below are some questions you must consider when writing about the research process (suggested sub-headings are given in bold font):

- How will you select your **sample**? What will be your sample size? How will you access the sample? Again you need to think carefully about these questions, as you must justify your sampling methods and criteria. **Inclusion and exclusion criteria** must be clearly stated and justified.
- What **data collection** methods are you using and why? You must convince the reader that you have carefully considered alternatives and that you have sufficient knowledge of the chosen methods to carry out the study. You should be realistic about constraints of time and resources. You may find it helpful to discuss your research design and methods of data collection with a critical colleague.
- How would you **analyse your data**? Your data analysis will be dependent upon whether it is qualitative or quantitative and the volume of data collected.
- Have you considered issues relating to the quality of your research process? e.g. **reliability and validity or trustworthiness** of the study.

Throughout this section you must support your arguments by reference to appropriate published literature on research methodologies. You must convince the reader that you are aware of the ontological and epistemological debates underpinning different research paradigms.

Access and Ethical Issues

In this section you should reflect upon your proposal and discuss any potential ethical problems and how you intend to address these issues. Particular attention should be given to informed consent, the storage of data, prevention of harm/distress to participants, the protection of anonymity of the participants and the wider institution. You should also consider whether you need ethical approval for your study and which ethical principles will guide the project. Considerations of governance arrangements need addressing.

Limitations

What are the potential **limitations of the proposed study?**

Dissemination

It is also important to identify how you will share your research findings with others, including the different ways in which you would try to ensure that your research improved practice and influenced policy decisions.

Reference list

The **Harvard Referencing System** you have used in previous Anglia Ruskin University assignments should be used. Please see the University Library website for Harvard System of referencing guide at: <http://libweb.anglia.ac.uk/referencing/referencing.htm>

Appendices

In your appendices **you should include** an anticipated schedule of your work together with costing, an example of a consent form, participant information sheet and a draft copy of any questionnaire, interview schedule or observation diary.

5.2.2 Option B. Systematic Review Research Proposal

The following guidance notes are intended to give you a clear idea of what should be included in your systematic review proposal. A proposal is written in a report style, **not** an essay, and **not** one free flowing piece of text. This assignment, although requiring a greater degree of critical reflection than the average systematic review proposal, largely follows this structure. It is therefore suggested that when writing your proposal you should use headings such as those listed below

Title

This is the name given to your systematic review proposal and needs to reflect the substance of your research plan. For example, if you were interested in knowing about the effectiveness of interventions to promote physical activity in children and adolescents then the title might be; *Effectiveness of interventions to promote physical activity in children and adolescents: systematic review proposal*

Although you will be anxious to complete your assignment take some time to think carefully (and refine) your research question. This is a very important part of the research process.

Abstract

Your abstract should be a concise summary of your proposal, yet it must also be comprehensive enough for the reader to gain an understanding of the proposed project. You may wish to begin with a general statement about the research problem the proposal seeks to address and then summarise the importance of the problem, the methodology you intend using together with a brief description of the SR protocol. The length of the abstract should be between 100-250 words, which are **not** included in the total word count.

Introduction (*rationale for proposed study*)

In this section you will need to provide the reader with the context to your research including the reason why you think the research should be undertaken. These reasons are likely to be work related but you will also need to place the research problem within a wider socio-political context. Some discussion of how you envisage your research being used in terms of developing policy and practice within your area of work should also be included in this section. For example, if you were proposing to carry out research on drug abusers you may wish to use the results to develop more effective treatment programmes. Before writing this section you should carefully considered some of the following question:

- What is the context of your research question/problem?
- What have others said about your research question/problem? - this section does not include your literature review but you may find it useful to refer to one or two sources which have helped you to identify your research question.
- Where, when and who are you studying? (Your research population – this is normally interpreted as people, but could be documentary sources or types of equipment).
- Is your research question identified as an issue within contemporary policy and practice developments?
- How will your research help to improve practice?
- State clearly the aim (general statement of intent) and objectives (specific issues to be addressed) of the proposed study.
- State clearly the research question.

Literature Review

Reviewing and evaluating research literature is central to the research process and in this section you will be discussing related research articles and relevant theoretical or policy perspectives that are most relevant to your research question. A good literature review is far more than a critical appraisal of a series of research studies, it should create a structure in which you legitimise carrying out your proposed study. You should consider some of the following questions in reviewing relevant literature:

- How was the literature search process conducted?
- What are the main theoretical perspectives contained within the literature?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the literature you have reviewed?
- What are the similarities and differences in the literature?
- Are there any inconsistencies in the literature?
- Are there any gaps in the literature, which your research would be addressing?
- Have you identified the interrelationships between previous literature and your proposed study?
- Have you justified any constraints in the review of the literature?

Remember that in this section you need to convince the reader that your research is worth doing. Your review will also need to be coherent so think carefully about how you wish to organise your discussion/critique of the relevant literature as well as developing your rationale for carrying out the study.

The literature review for an SR requires also in addition to the above include discussion relating to a scoping review. This involves a quick and unsystematic search of an electronic database to ensure that there will be sufficient research to include in the review and not so much that that review will become unmanageable. During the scoping review it is also important to ensure that research question has not already been answered using an up-to-date and valid systematic review. **The details of all papers** identified in this scoping review are **not necessarily reported** in your literature to support the proposal but are part of your rationale for supporting the methodology.

Part of the scoping review should enable you to determine the nature of the research approach adopted in the field i.e. qualitative/quantitative/mixed methods.

Methodology

In this section you must carefully consider the different research paradigms. You must show that you have an understanding of the overall research approaches. Your choice and defence of a particular methodology will be based on an epistemology (theory of knowledge) relevant to your research question, rather than personal choice. In the context of an SR you will need to determine what type of research

designs will best address your topic. There is never only one way to study a research question so you must critically analyse philosophies underpinning qualitative and quantitative approaches to justify the appropriateness of your chosen methodology.

- What research paradigm is most appropriate and why have you chosen this particular paradigm?

Research Protocol

A research protocol for a systematic review is a strategic plan which ensures that the evidence obtained enables you to answer the research question as unambiguously as possible, and would allow another researcher to replicate the review. It is therefore important for the search process to be explicit and unequivocal. In the research protocol the search strategy, quality appraisal, data collection methods, data synthesis are outlined and justified.

Your review protocol should include the following

- **Criteria for including studies:** Describe and justify the type of studies which you would include, eg qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, surveys etc. In this section use subheadings to discuss and justify the inclusion and exclusion criteria you will apply to the SR question. Eg population, intervention, study design, outcomes etc. You must consider hierarchy of evidence.
- **Identification of studies:**
Provide a list of search terms. These need to be identified and justified in relation to the research question and scoping review. The list of search terms/keywords should be developed drawing on synonyms and related terms. Each concept identified within the research question should be included in this process

You should detail and justify your electronic database search including which databases (Medline, EMBASE, ISI Web of Knowledge, Google Scholar, etc), between which years. You should also detail which journals you intend to hand search and if you are going to screen review articles and other bibliographies.
- **Study selection:** Here you would describe how you intend to handle all the studies that you identify and how you make a final selection for the review
- **Quality assessment:** Appraisal of Rigour. This section requires you to discuss QA process in terms of internal and external validity or trustworthiness and its relevance to ensuing good quality data. You should provide details of an appropriate tool for this purpose with a justification for your decision.
- **Quality assessment -:** Ethical Appraisal. In this section you should reflect upon what issues you would need to appraise in studies which are part of your review. Which ethical principles do you need to consider in relation to the appraisal of the studies for inclusion in the SR. In addition you need to consider what steps you will undertake to ensure your SR is ethically sound.
- **Data extraction:** Here you should describe and justify what data you will extract, eg methods, sample intervention etc, and what type of tool you will use to guide the process. An example of the data abstraction tool should be included as an appendix.
- **Data analysis:** Here you should describe how you will handle the data. What you do with the data may very much depend on what you will be able to extract from the individual papers. You

need to consider what type of data is most likely to be found (quantitative or qualitative or both) and the proposed data synthesis and presentation strategy eg meta analysis etc

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Limitations

What are the **potential limitations of the Systematic Review?**

Dissemination

It is also important to identify how you will share your research findings with others, including the different ways in which you would try to ensure that your research improved practice and influenced policy decisions.

Reference list

The **Harvard Referencing System** you have used in previous Anglia Ruskin University assignments should be used. Please see the University Library website for Harvard System of referencing guide at: <http://libweb.anglia.ac.uk/referencing/referencing.htm>

Appendices

In your appendices you might include an anticipated schedule of your work, a data abstraction form, quality appraisal tool etc.