PROPOSAL WRITING

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PURPOSE

“The intent of the proposal is to construct a feasible plan for you to explore, understand or test a concern about which you are curious and do not know the answer.” (Reitsma-Street, 2007)

• Proposal writing is about learning to clearly articulate the process of inquiry

• Statement of intent and feasible plan to engage in research
AUDIENCE

• Academic Committees (Reitsma-Street, 2007)

• Practice Settings – negotiating a “project”

• Small grant proposals – response to a funding call
  • Format may be specified (usually shorter)
  • Need to use the language of the call (see example)

• Fellowships and large granting agencies (e.g. CIHR)
PRELIMINARY PROPOSAL

• Usually the most difficult part of the process

• Finding the focus of your inquiry

• Length depends on purpose (2-5 pages)

• Share with your supervisory committee

• Being able to clearly state your overall aim (what you want to learn) and how this knowledge contributes to your discipline.

• Write and re-write as your thinking develops
ACADEMIC PROPOSALS

Blueprint Type
• 20-35 pages

• Projects (e.g. literature review with identification of implications for policy & practice)

• Thesis (literature review is integral to demonstrate gaps in knowledge)

(Reitsma-Street, 2007)

Foundations Type
• 50-75 pages

• Dissertations (PhD)

• More extensive literature review (substantive, theoretical & methodological)

• Draft Chapters
TYPICAL FORMAT

• Introduction
• Background and Significance
• Literature Review
• Purpose & Objectives
• Methodology
• Ethical Considerations/Limitations
• Timeline & Budget (if required)
• References
• Appendices
INTRODUCTION

• What do you want to learn more about & why?

• What is your overall research question or phenomenon of interest?

• Who are you and why do you want to study this in this way?

• Be creative!!! (grab the reader’s attention)

• Sometimes a practice story helps generate interest in your topic
BACKGROUND & SIGNIFICANCE

• Provides your reader with a basic understanding of your topic/focus of your inquiry
  • Assume your reader knows less about your topic than you do
  • Guide your reader through your thinking process

• Makes a case for why your study is important
  • Link to other studies that demonstrate the importance of your inquiry focus
  • Keep it real, don’t exaggerate
LITERATURE REVIEW

• Depth required here will depend on the purpose of your proposal (e.g. some projects are literature reviews)

• Purpose is to:
  • Demonstrate that you know something about your topic
  • Discuss what is already known about your topic (disciplinary knowledge)
  • Critically analyze the strengths & weakness of this body of literature
  • Identify gaps in knowledge
PURPOSE & OBJECTIVES

• Needs to flow from:
  • Your reflections on personal/professional experience
  • The literature you have reviewed (empirical & theoretical )

• Can be written in different ways
  • A puzzle or problematic
  • Overall purpose with specific objectives
  • Research questions with or without hypotheses

• Opportunity to clarify what drives a study
  • e.g. your beliefs, values & assumptions

• Conceptual and/or operational definitions (when relevant)
What does methodology mean to you?

- Theoretically informed approaches to research? (Design)
- Opportunity to explicate epistemological assumptions?
- What is the relationship between methodology & research methods?

- Data collection methods (includes recruitment)

- Analytic methods

- Approaches to Knowledge Translation
ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

• Relates to both research ethics and your profession

• What are the implications of studying this (area of inquiry) in this way (links to methodology)?

• Might not contain all the details required for your ethics application

• If your research involves human participants, online tutorials from Tri-council (a must!)

http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/education/tutorial-didacticiel/
LIMITATIONS

- Demonstrates that you understand the limitations of your project

- Relates to the epistemological assumptions & rigour of your methodology

- Most journals will require this section
TIMELINE

- Be realistic
- Remember other commitments & self-care
- Remember to include realistic timelines for feedback from your supervisory committee (e.g. 2 week minimum)
- Remember to build in time for Ethical Review
- Sample backwards timelines (goal can be motivating) 😊
BUDGET

• A justified budget is VIP for a grant call
• Request samples from supervisory committee
• Read the grant carefully (exclusion criteria)
• Have someone else double check your math
REFERENCES & APPENDICES

• Strongly recommend a reference manager system (e.g. Ref Works)

• May include research instruments

• May include recruitment posters, information for participants & consent forms (need for ethical review)
SUMMARY

• Proposal writing reflects the process of inquiry & the purpose of the particular proposal

• Begin by demonstrating why your inquiry is relevant for you and important for your discipline

• Guide your reader through your thinking processes

• Demonstrate your ability to summarize, critically analyze & synthesize literature

• Demonstrate your understanding of your chosen approach to inquiry (including the epistemological assumptions & limitations)
REFLECTIONS

• Student inquiry projects are a learning experience

• Be clear, concise & creative. Have fun!!!

• Seek support from your peers (some of these relationships may last a lifetime)