# GUIDELINES TO WRITING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

## TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL/PROJECT

The title summarises the main topic of your research proposal or project. It should accurately reflect the content of your research. It is advisable to limit your title to 15 words or fewer. In other words the title shouldn't be too '*wordy*'. If you can remove words from your title without changing the meaning, do so. Your title should be understandable on its own. Your readers should not have to refer to your proposal to understand your title.

Before you make a final decision on your topic make sure it is plausible i.e. the time frame in which you have to complete your research and the practicalities of conducting the research. In this regard, it is important to consider the following:

- Will you have enough time to read all the most important academic literature on this topic? If there's too much information to tackle, consider narrowing your focus even more.
- Will you be able to find enough sources or gather enough data to fulfil the requirements of the research project/dissertation? If you think you might struggle to find information, consider broadening or shifting your focus.
- Do you have to go to a specific location to gather data on the topic? Make sure that you have enough funding and practical access.
- Will the topic hold your interest for the length of the research process? To stay motivated, it is important to choose something you're enthusiastic about!
- Last but not least, it is also important that your topic is interesting not only interesting to you, but it should also be academically, socially or practically relevant.

    - *Academic relevance* means that the research can fill a gap in knowledge or contribute to a scholarly debate in your field.
    - *Social relevance* means that the research can advance our understanding of society and inform social change.
    - *Practical relevance* means that the research can be applied to solve concrete problems or improve real-life processes.

## INTRODUCTION: CHAPTER 1

The introduction is a brief description of what the research proposal is about. It should not be confused with the background of the study. The introduction should:

- ✓ Give background and context of your study.
- ✓ Outline your research problem, research aim & objectives, research questions or hypothesis
- ✓ Explain the rationale of your study
- ✓ Scope of the study

## 1.1 Background

The first part of your proposal is the initial pitch for your project, so make sure it succinctly explains what you want to do and why. The background (or context) helps the reader understand the specific problems addressed by the researcher. The various elements considered at this stage should be related among them to show how they lead to the problem that is going to be isolated and treated by the researcher. Sufficient background information helps your reader determine if you have a basic understanding of the research problem being investigated.

Background information identifies and describes the history and nature of a well-defined research problem with reference to the existing literature. Incorporating background information into the introduction is intended to provide the reader with critical information about the topic being studied, such as, highlighting and expanding upon foundational studies conducted in the past, describing important historical events that inform why and in what ways the research problem exists, or defining key components of your study [concepts, people, places, phenomena].

In this section, the author usually outlines the historical developments in the literature that led to the current topic of research concisely. If the study is interdisciplinary, it should describe how different disciplines are connected and what aspects of each discipline will be studied. Hence, you should briefly highlight the main developments of your research topic and identify the main gaps that need to be addressed. In other words, this section should give an overview of your study. The following could be considered in this section:

i. What is known about the broad topic?
ii. Who has an interest in the topic (e.g. scientists, practitioners, policymakers, particular members of society)?
iii. Who does the problem affect?
iv. Has it been an issue for a long time, or is it a newly discovered problem?
v. What research has already been done or how much is already known about the problem?
vi. Have any solutions been proposed?
vii. What are the current debates about the problem, and what do you think is missing from them?
viii. What is the significance of addressing those gaps in other words why is this research worth doing?

This information provides the reader with the essential context needed to understand the research problem and its significance before moving on to the literature review. N:B Although background information can often blend into the literature review portion of the paper in social sciences research, basic background information should not be

considered a substitute for a comprehensive review and synthesis of relevant research literature.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Whether you're planning your thesis, starting a research paper/project or writing a research proposal, the research problem is the first step towards knowing exactly what you'll do and why. You have to identify and delineate the research problem by highlighting what you want to solve and what questions you wish to answer.

Bwisa (2018) defines a research problem as an area of concern, a gap in the existing knowledge, or a deviation in the norm or standard that points to the need for further understanding and investigation.

McCombes, 2020, defines a research problem as a specific issue, difficulty, contradiction, or gap in knowledge that you will aim to address in your research. You might look for practical problems aimed at contributing to change, or theoretical problems aimed at expanding knowledge. She further distinguishes between practical and theoretical problems. Practical problems could focus on: issues with performance or efficiency, processes that could be improved upon; areas of concern among practitioners in a field or difficulties faced by specific groups of people in society. Meanwhile, theoretical research problems could focus on expanding knowledge and understanding rather than directly contributing to change.

You can identify a research problem by reading recent research, theory and debates on your topic to find a gap in what is currently known about it. You might look for a phenomenon or context that has not been closely studied; contradiction between two or more perspectives; situation or relationship that is not well understood or a troubling question that has yet to be resolved. Theoretical problems often have practical consequences, but they are not focused on solving an immediate issue in a specific place (though you might take a case study approach to the research).

### *Why do we write a research problem?*

Without a well-defined research problem, you are likely to end up with an unfocused and unmanageable project. You might end up repeating what other people have already said/done, trying to say too much, or doing research without a clear purpose and justification. You need a problem in order to do research that contributes new and relevant insights.

Therefore, the main aim of the problem statement is to transform a generalized problem (something that bothers you; a perceived lack) into a targeted, well-defined problem; one that can be resolved through focused research and careful decision-making. Writing a problem statement will help you focus your research and create a more cohesive and guided project. It should help you clearly identify the purpose of the research project you will propose.

In science or other areas of research, it is easy to get side tracked by the wealth of knowledge and information that is available. By writing a problem statement, you can force yourself to remain focused on answering a specific question at hand. This allows you to ultimately achieve better results and not to waste time pursuing unnecessary avenues or detours from your main goal.

Hence, the problem statement helps direct your reader's attention quickly to the issues that your proposed project will address and provides the reader(s) with a succinct statement of the proposed project itself.

***How to write a problem statement***

T*he problem* statement is used in research work as a claim that highlights the problem addressed by a study. In other words, it answers the questions, *what is the problem the research will address and why it is worth investigating?* To answer this question should be the first paragraph of your problem statement. It is advisable that you consider the four Ws, and answer them completely providing facts or statistics where possible so that the reader can appreciate the magnitude of the problem. The four Ws are:

i. *Who the problem affects (You could provide statistics of the extent of the problem)?*
ii. *What the outcome would be if the problem was not solved?*
iii. *Where the problem is taking place?*
iv. *Why is it important for the problem to be fixed?*

The second paragraph should focus on presenting an overview on current research/strands of literature on the subject and existing debates. Choosing a topic that is clearly connected to current issues or debates, either in society at large or in your academic discipline is the easiest way to make sure your research is relevant. The relevance must be clearly stated when you define your research problem. Explain how this research will contribute to the investigation of the problem, or how the problem has emerged from previous research. The context you provide here situates your study in a particular academic field (English & van Tonder, 2010).

Thereafter, identify the research gap/niche by highlighting under-explored aspects and areas of concern, conflict or controversy. Your goal is to find a gap that your research project can fill. Conclude by stating the intent of your study. 'It is often helpful to visualize your research as a slice of cake, where the whole cake would be the whole field of study, all the questions you would ask of all the people involved, or all the situations and theories involved. In all instances (impossible to do of course), defining what your slice of the cake will be, can be seen to be as what is manageable and just enough to be coherent, not too much to be confusing and too far reaching, and something from which you can actually research and produce interpreted findings, some contribution to knowledge and meaning' (Wisker, 2008).

***Characteristics of a good problem statement***

A good research problem should have the following characteristics:

i. It should address a gap in knowledge;
ii. It should be significant enough to contribute to the existing body of research;
iii. It should lead to further research;
iv. The problem should render itself to investigation through collection of data;
v. It should be of interest to the researcher and suit his/her skills, time, and resources;
vi. The approach towards solving the problem should be ethical;

vii. It need not be long and elaborate: half a page is ideal for a good statement of problem.

**1.3 Aim(s)/ and Specific Objectives**

Formulating research aim and objectives in an appropriate manner is one of the most important aspects of your research project. This is because the primary focus of your research project is usually expressed in terms of aims and objectives. Achievement of **research aim** provides answer(s) to the research question(s) (the central question of the study). Research aim and objectives also determine the scope, depth and the overall direction of the research.

Yet many students find it difficult to understand the difference between aims and objectives. However, in the academic context there is a clear distinction between these terms.
***Aim*** *= what you hope to achieve.*

***Objective*** *= the action(s) you will take in order to achieve the aim.*

***Aims*** *= are statements of intent. They are usually written in broad terms. They set out what you hope to achieve at the end of the project.*

***Objectives****, on the other hand, should be specific statements that define measurable outcomes, e.g. what steps will be taken to achieve the desired outcome.*

In other words, research aim specifies ***WHAT*** needs to be studied and research objectives comprise a number of steps that address ***HOW*** research aim will be achieved. Research objectives divide research aim into several parts and address each part separately.

When writing your objectives try to use strong positive statements.

**Strong verbs -** collect, construct, classify, develop, devise, measure, produce, revise, select, determine, identify, assess, synthesise

**Weak verbs** - appreciate, consider, enquire, learn, know, understand, be aware of, appreciate, listen, perceive

Objectives should also be **S.M.A.R.T.** - which means they should be:
**S**pecific – be precise about what you are going to do
**M**easureable –you will know when you have reached your goal
**A**chievable – Don't attempt too much – a less ambitious but completed objective is better than an over-ambitious one that you cannot possible achieve.
**R**ealistic – do you have the necessary resources to achieve the objective – time, money, skills, etc.
**T**ime constrained – determine when each stage needs to be completed. Is there time in your schedule to allow for unexpected delays?

***How many aims or objectives should there be?***

As a rule of thumb, it is recommended to have one research aim and several research objectives to facilitate the achievement of this aim. Likewise, there is no fixed number of objectives but you will be required to produce sufficient objectives to be able to measure progress towards meeting the aim/s.

An example of aim and specific objectives is highlighted below:

**Aim**

To estimate the impact of participation in Fertilizer Input Support Programme (FISP) on gendered household food availability measured by months of adequate household food provisioning (MAHFP).

**Specific objectives**

i. To characterize and measure MAHFP across gender of decision makers on crop production
ii. To determine the factors that influence smallholder farmers' participation in FISP by gender of the decision maker.
iii. To estimate the impact of participation in FISP on MAHFP by gender of the decision maker on crop production

***Common mistakes made when formulating aims and objectives***

- Choosing the topic too broadly.
- Setting an unrealistic aim.
- Choosing research methods incompatible with the timeframe available. The time frame available need to be taken into account when formulating research aims and objectives and selecting specific research methods.

### 1.4 Hypothesis (Major Assumptions) or Research questions

A researcher always posits a possible solution(s) to the problem envisaged and this is called Hypothesis for quantitative researchers. A hypothesis is a provisional supposition put forth to account for known facts, and to serve as a starting-point for further investigation by which it may be proved or disapproved. Hence a hypothesis is an assumption of causality, a proposed interconnection among phenomena, a tentative solution to be verified by the researcher‘s investigation. In a single study, one can have a number of hypotheses, although it may be easier to have one.

Research question(s) should emanate from the specific objectives. It is a question around which you center your research. It should be:

- **Clear**: it provides enough specifics that one’s audience can easily understand its purpose without needing additional explanation.
- **Focused**: it is narrow enough that it can be answered thoroughly in the space the writing task allows.
- **Concise**: it is expressed in the fewest possible words.
- **Complex**: it is not answerable with a simple “yes” or “no,” but rather requires synthesis and analysis of ideas and sources prior to composition of an answer.
- **Arguable**: its potential answers are open to debate rather than accepted facts.

An example of research questions for the specific objectives highlighted above include:

i. How many months in a year did the farmers have adequate food?
ii. What are the factors that influence smallholder farmer’s participation in FISP conditional on the gender of the decision maker with respect to crop production decisions?
iii. What impact does FISP participation have on MAHFP by gender of the decision maker?

### 1.5 Justification/Motivation/Rationale/Significance

The rationale should answer the need for conducting the said research. It justifies the significance and novelty of the study. The justification or rationale of your study should explain how your study specifically addresses gaps in the literature, insufficient consideration of the topic, or other deficiency in the literature; and note the broader theoretical, empirical, and/or policy contributions and implications of your research.

Some of the important issues questions to ask when writing the rationale include:

i. Who will benefit from resolving the problem (e.g. smallholder farmers, policy makers or future researchers etc.)?

ii. What are the potential implications of your research for theory or practice, and emphasize again what you aim to contribute to existing knowledge on the topic. For example, your results might have implications for:

- Informing policy objectives
- Strengthening a theory or model
- Challenging popular or scientific assumptions
- Improving processes in a specific location or field

**1.6 Delimitations/Scope of the Study**

Delimitations refer to those characteristics that limit the scope and define the conceptual boundaries of your research. This is determined by the conscious exclusionary and inclusionary decisions you make about how to investigate the research problem. In other words, not only should you tell the reader what it is you are studying and why, but you must also acknowledge why you rejected alternative approaches that could have been used to examine the topic.

Obviously, the first limiting step was the choice of research problem itself. However, implicit are other, related problems that could have been chosen but were rejected. These should be noted in the conclusion of your introduction. The point is not to document every possible delimiting factor, but to highlight why previously researched issues related to the topic were not addressed.

**Examples of delimitating choices would be:**

- The key aims and objectives of your study,
- The research questions that you address,
- The variables of interest [i.e., the various factors and features of the phenomenon being studied],
- The method(s) of investigation,
- The time period your study covers, and
- Any relevant alternative theoretical frameworks that could have been adopted.

Review each of these decisions. Not only do you clearly establish what you intend to accomplish in your research, but you should also include a declaration of what the study does not intend to cover. In the latter case, your exclusionary decisions should be based upon criteria understood as, "not interesting"; "not directly relevant"; “too problematic because..."; "not feasible," and the like. Make this reasoning explicit!

**NOTE:**

i. **Delimitations refer to the initial choices made about the broader, overall design of your study** and should not be confused with documenting the **limitations of your study** discovered after the research has been completed.
ii. Do not view delimitating statements as admitting to an inherent failing or shortcoming in your research. They are an accepted element of academic writing

intended to keep the reader focused on the research problem by explicitly defining the conceptual boundaries and scope of your study. It addresses any critical questions in the reader's mind of, "Why the hell didn't the author examine this?"

### 1.7 Definition of Key terms

In most cases, there are main terms related to the study that require to be specified or clarified in order to provide a correct understanding of the study on the part of the reader. These terms need to be defined precisely and concisely and should not be necessarily a dictionary definitions but a researcher's definition; the way he or she understands it. Sometimes the definition of key terms is incorporated in the literature review section.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review is a survey of scholarly sources on a specific topic. It provides an overview of current knowledge, allowing you to identify relevant theories, methods, and gaps in the existing research. It's important to show that you are familiar with the most important research on your topic. A strong literature review convinces the reader that your project has a solid foundation in existing knowledge or theory. It also shows that you are not simply repeating what other people have already done or said.

In this section, aim to demonstrate exactly how your project will contribute to conversations in the field.

- Compare and contrast: what are the main theories, methods, debates and controversies?
- Be critical: what are the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches?
- Show how your research fits in: how will you build on, challenge, or synthesize the work of others?

Conducting a literature review involves collecting, evaluating and analysing publications (such as books and journal articles) that relate to your research question. There are five main steps in the process of writing a literature review:

1. **Search** for relevant literature
2. **Evaluate** sources
3. **Identify** themes, debates and gaps
4. **Outline** the structure
5. **Write** your literature review

A good literature review doesn't just summarize sources – it analyses, synthesizes, and critically evaluates to give a clear picture of the state of knowledge on the subject.

**How to Synthesize Written Information.** The following write up was authored by Shona McCombes, 2020

When you write a literature review or essay, you have to go beyond just summarizing the articles you've read – you need to **synthesize** the literature to show how it all fits together (and how your own research fits in).

Synthesizing simply means combining. Instead of summarizing the main points of each source in turn, you put together the ideas and findings of multiple sources in order to make an overall point.

At the most basic level, this involves looking for similarities and differences between your sources. Your synthesis should show the reader where the sources overlap and where they diverge.

Unsynthesized Example

*Franz (2008) studied undergraduate online students. He looked at 17 females and 18 males and found that none of them liked APA. According to Franz, the evidence suggested that all students are reluctant to learn citations style. Perez (2010) also studies undergraduate students. She looked at 42 females and 50 males and found that males were significantly more inclined to use citation software (p < .05). Findings suggest that females might graduate sooner. Goldstein (2012) looked at British undergraduates. Among a sample of 50, all females, all confident in their abilities to cite and were eager to write their dissertations.*

Source Used with Permission: The Chicago School

Synthesized Example

*Studies of undergraduate students reveal conflicting conclusions regarding relationships between advanced scholarly study and citation efficacy. Although Franz (2008) found that no participants enjoyed learning citation style, Goldstein (2012) determined in a larger study that all participants watched felt comfortable citing sources, suggesting that variables among participant and control group populations must be examined more closely. Although Perez (2010) expanded on Franz's original study with a larger, more diverse sample...*

Source Used with Permission: The Chicago School

**McLeod, S. A. (2020, March 28). *How to Synthesize Written Information*. Simply Psychology**. https://www.simplypsychology.org/synthesising.html

There are usually four steps involved in synthesising your literature review. They include:

i. Organize your sources
ii. Outline your structure
iii. Write paragraphs with topic sentences
iv. Revise, edit and proofread

**Step 1: Organize your sources**

After collecting the relevant literature, you've got a lot of information to work through, and no clear idea of how it all fits together.

Before you can start writing, you need to organize your notes in a way that allows you to see the relationships between sources.

One way to begin synthesizing the literature is to put your notes into a table. Depending on your topic and the type of literature you're dealing with, there are a couple of different ways you can organize this.

**Summary table**

A summary table collates the key points of each source under consistent headings. This is a good approach if your sources tend to have a similar structure – for instance, if they're all empirical papers.

Each row in the table lists one source, and each column identifies a specific part of the source. You can decide which headings to include based on what's most relevant to the literature you're dealing with. For example, you might include columns for things like aims, methods, variables, population, sample size, and conclusion. For each study, you briefly summarize each of these aspects. You can also include columns for your own evaluation and analysis.

| | Aims | Methods | Population | Conclusion | Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Source 1 | | | | | |
| Source 2 | | | | | |
| Source 3 | | | | | |
| Source 4 | | | | | |

The summary table gives you a quick overview of the key points of each source. This allows you to group sources by relevant similarities, as well as noticing important differences or contradictions in their findings.

**Synthesis matrix**

A synthesis matrix is useful when your sources are more varied in their purpose and structure – for example, when you're dealing with books and essays making various different arguments about a topic.

Each column in the table lists one source. Each row is labelled with a specific concept, topic or theme that recurs across all or most of the sources.

Then, for each source, you summarize the main points or arguments related to the theme.

| | Source 1 | Source 2 | Source 3 | Source 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Theme 1 | | | | |
| Theme 2 | | | | |
| Theme 3 | | | | |
| Theme 4 | | | | |

The purposes of the table is to identify the common points that connect the sources, as well as identifying points where they diverge or disagree.

**Step 2: Outline your structure**

Now you should have a clear overview of the main connections and differences between the sources you've read. Next, you need to decide how you'll group them together and the order in which you'll discuss them.

For shorter papers, your outline can just identify the focus of each paragraph; for longer papers, you might want to divide it into sections with headings.

There are a few different approaches you can take to help you structure your synthesis.

If your sources cover a broad time period, and you found patterns in how researchers approached the topic over time, you can organize your discussion **chronologically**.

That doesn't mean you just summarize each paper in chronological order; instead, you should group articles into time periods and identify what they have in common, as well as signalling important turning points or developments in the literature.

If the literature covers various different topics, you can organize it **thematically**.

That means that each paragraph or section focuses on a specific theme and explains how that theme is approached in the literature.

Source Used with Permission: The Chicago School

If you're drawing on literature from various different fields or they use a wide variety of research methods, you can organize your sources **methodologically**.

That means grouping together studies based on the type of research they did and discussing the findings that emerged from each method.

If your topic involves a debate between different schools of thought, you can organize it **theoretically**.

That means comparing the different theories that have been developed and grouping together papers based on the position or perspective they take on the topic, as well as evaluating which arguments are most convincing.

### Step 3: Write paragraphs with topic sentences

What sets a synthesis apart from a summary is that it combines various sources. The easiest way to think about this is that each paragraph should discuss a few different sources, and you should be able to condense the overall point of the paragraph into one sentence.

This is called a topic sentence, and it usually appears at the start of the paragraph. The topic sentence signals what the whole paragraph is about; every sentence in the paragraph should be clearly related to it.

A topic sentence can be a simple summary of the paragraph's content:

- "Early research on [x] focused heavily on [y]."

For an effective synthesis, you can use topic sentences to link back to the previous paragraph, highlighting a point of debate or critique:

- "Several scholars have pointed out the flaws in this approach."
- "While recent research has attempted to address the problem, many of these studies have methodological flaws that limit their validity."

By using topic sentences, you can ensure that your paragraphs are coherent and clearly show the connections between the articles you are discussing.

As you write your paragraphs, avoid quoting directly from sources: use your own words to explain the commonalities and differences that you found in the literature.

Don't try to cover every single point from every single source – the key to synthesizing is to extract the most important and relevant information and combine it to give your reader an overall picture of the state of knowledge on your topic.

### Step 4: Revise, edit and proofread

Like any other piece of academic writing, synthesizing literature doesn't happen all in one go – it involves redrafting, revising, editing and proofreading your work.

#### Checklist for Synthesis

- Do I introduce the paragraph with a clear, focused topic sentence?
- Do I discuss more than one source in the paragraph?
- Do I mention only the most relevant findings, rather than describing every part of the studies?

- Do I discuss the similarities or differences between the sources, rather than summarizing each source in turn?
- Do I put the findings or arguments of the sources in my own words?
- Is the paragraph organized around a single idea?
- Is the paragraph directly relevant to my research question or topic?
- Is there a logical transition from this paragraph to the next one?
- Whether you're synthesizing literature for an essay, a literature review, or any other paper, you should make sure you can answer yes to all of these questions.
- If you need help with your academic language or extra feedback on structure, consider using a professional academic editing service.

**Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

In nearly all studies, there are grand theories or ideas which act as an internal structure of the study. This structure gives the study a "logical frame" or a logical explanation, particularly because, most studies are only additional to the already existing body of knowledge and not the first ones. Therefore, every study is depending on previous studies whose ideas are already known. These ideas, especially if they have been significant and have had extensive influence in their domains, serve to support the fresh owns. Moreover, every study relates to theory, either to negate it or confirming it to improve upon it.

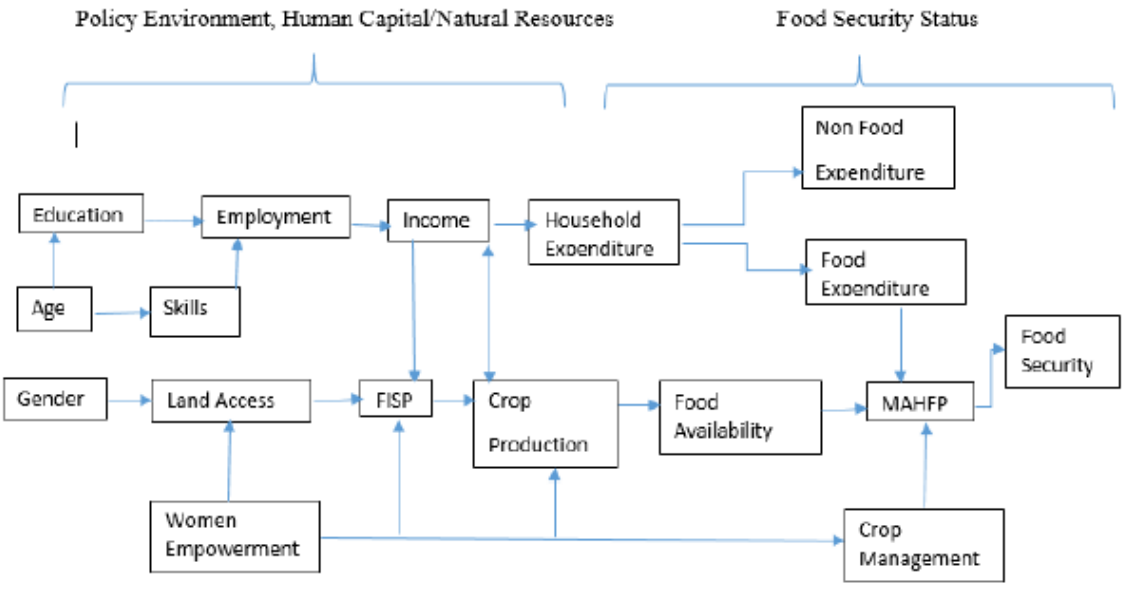


**Figure 1: links between different factors that affect the MAHFP and ultimately food security**

Source: Adapted from Mofya-Mukuka and Sambo, 2018

Whereas the theoretical framework tends to refer to the theoretical critique with a view to identifying the most appropriate to one's study, the conceptual framework tends to refer to the diagrammatic presentation to the logical flow of the ideas presented in the proposal. An example of a conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1 above.

## 3. CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology section should describe the overall approach and practical steps you will take to answer your research questions. In other words, the section gives an account of how you will carry out your research. In this section you need to describe the research design, study area, subjects or sample of your study and the sampling technique i.e. the criteria you used to exclude or include your subjects. You also need to describe the data/information you will collect, the procedures you will use to collect your data, and the methods you will use to analyse it.

Listed below are some of the considerations that you have to make:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Research type** | • Will you do qualitative or quantitative research?<br>• Will you collect original data i.e. work with primary or secondary sources?<br>• Is your research design: survey, descriptive, correlational, or experimental? |
| **Sources** | • Exactly what or who will you study (e.g. small scale farmers in Zambia or a district)?<br>• How will you select subjects or sources (e.g. random sampling, snowballing, case studies etc.)?<br>• When and where will you collect the data? |
| **Research methods** | • What tools and procedures will you use (e.g. Interviews, observations, focus group discussions, questionnaires, experiments) to collect data?<br>• What tools and procedures will you use analyse data?<br>• Why are these the best methods to answer your research questions? |
| **Practicalities** | • How much time will you need to collect the data?<br>• How will you gain access to participants or sources?<br>• Do you foresee any potential obstacles, and how will you address them? |

Source: McCombes, 2020

- Your methodology section should be written in sufficient detail for your readers to be able to repeat your method following your description.
- In preparation for writing your own methodology section, it would be a good idea to read the methods sections of journal articles/ thesis/ existing research project reports in

your field of research, asking whether you will be able to repeat the methods and procedures described.

- Make sure not to simply write a list of methods. Aim to make an argument for why this is the most appropriate, valid and reliable approach to answering your questions.

### 3.1 Ethical considerations

When writing a proposal you should show that you have considered the potential ethical issues involved in carrying out the research you propose. The main purpose of ethics in research is to ensure that no one is harmed or suffers adverse consequences as a result of studies being carried out. There are many ethical issues that may need to be considered when undertaking research. Often ethics issues will have to be weighed against each other when designing and presenting research.

The top 5 principles of research ethics are:

- **Minimize the risk of harm:** Research should not harm the participants involved. If there is any possibility that participants might be harmed or placed in an uncomfortable position there must be strong justifications for doing so. There are a number of different types of harm including physical harm, psychological distress and damage to participants' financial status
- **Obtain informed consent:** Informed consent means that participants should understand that they are taking part in research and know what is required of them. This information may include the purpose of the research, the methods being used and the possible outcomes. In general the participant should be provided with any information that could influence their decision to participate in the research. Participants should be volunteers and take part without being coerced or deceived.
- **Protect anonymity and confidentiality:** Research data should be protected at all stages of the process from collection to publication. If researchers intend to provide the identity of participants in their study, permission should be obtained first. An alternative to disclosing identities is to remove identifiers such as names and geographical locations.
- **Avoid deceptive practices:** researchers should avoid any type of deceptive practices whenever possible. However there are some cases when deception is necessary such as when knowledge of the research may alter the outcome. When deception is necessary it should be explained

- **Provide the right to withdraw:** Research participants should have the right to withdraw from the process at any point and should be made aware of this from the start. If a participant chooses to withdraw they shouldn't be pressured in any way to prevent them from ceasing to participate.

## 4. RESEARCH SCHEDULE/WORK PLAN

The work plan/research schedule shows the specific time which specific tasks are to be completed (or time framework). You might have to include a detailed timeline of the project, explaining exactly what you will do at each stage and how long it will take.

| Example research schedule | | |
|---|---|---|
| Research phase | Objectives | Deadline |
| 1. Background research and literature review | • Meet with supervisor for initial discussion<br>• Conduct a more extensive review of relevant literature<br>• Refine the research questions<br>• Develop a theoretical framework | 20th February |
| 2. Research design planning | • Design questionnaires<br>• Identify online and offline channels for recruiting participants<br>• Finalize sampling methods and data analysis methods | 13th March |
| 3. Data collection and preparation | • Recruit participants and send out questionnaires<br>• Conduct semi-structured interviews with selected participants<br>• Transcribe and code interviews and clean survey data | 24th April |
| 4. Data analysis | • Statistically analyze survey data<br>• Conduct thematic analysis of interview transcripts<br>• Draft the results and discussion chapters | 22nd May |
| 5. Writing | • Complete a full thesis draft<br>• Meet with supervisor to discuss feedback and revisions | 17th July |
| 6. Revision | • Redraft based on feedback<br>• Get supervisor approval for final draft<br>• Proofread<br>• Print, bind and submit | 28th August |

You may want to present your research schedule as a Gantt Chart. Below is an example of a Gantt chart

| **Activity** | **Week** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** |
| Inception report | | | | | | |
| Desk review | | | | | | |
| Development of interview schedules | | | | | | |
| Pretesting of data collection instruments | | | | | | |
| Data collection (primary & secondary data) | | | | | | |
| Data entry & analysis | | | | | | |
| Submission of Interim report | | | | | | |
| Writing of draft report and presentation | | | | | | |
| Finalizing of draft report & Submission | | | | | | |

## 5. BUDGET

If you are applying for research funding, you will probably also have to include a detailed budget that shows how much each part of the project will cost.

Make sure to check what type of costs the funding body will agree to cover, and only include relevant items in your budget. For each item, include:

- **Cost**: exactly how much money do you need?
- **Justification**: why is this cost necessary to complete the research?
- **Source**: how did you calculate the amount?

To determine your budget, think about:

- **Travel costs**: do you need to go to specific locations to collect data? How will you get there, how long will you spend there, and what will you do there (e.g. interviews, archival research)?
- **Materials**: do you need access to any tools or technologies? Are there training or installation costs?
- **Assistance**: do you need to hire research assistants for the project? What will they do and how much will you pay them? Will you outsource any other tasks such as transcription?
- **Time**: do you need to take leave from regular duties such as teaching? How much will you need to cover the time spent on the research?

**Example of a template you could use**

| No. | Description | Unit | Quantity | Unit Price (ZMW) | Total Amount ( ZMW) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |

## REFERENCES/ BIBLIOGRAPHY

Your research proposal must include proper citations for every source you have used, and full publication details should always be included in the reference list.

In some cases, you might be asked to include a bibliography. This is a list of all the sources you consulted in preparing the proposal, even ones you did not cite in the text, and sometimes also other relevant sources that you plan to read. The aim is to show the full range of literature that will support your research project.

*N:B experiment and learn how to use the free online referencing rather than doing it manually.*

Use the recommended Harvard Referencing system. https://ufh.za.libguides.com/c.php?g=91522&p=590675

| **Books & eBooks** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Material Type** | **In-Text Example** | **Reference List Example** |
| **Book: single author** | (Holt, 1997) or Holt (1997) wrote that... | Holt, D.H. 1997. *Management principles and practices.* Sydney: Prentice-Hall. |
| **Book: 2 or 3 authors** | (McCarthy, William & Pascale, 1997) | McCarthy, E.J., William, D.P. & Pascale, G.Q. 1997. *Basic marketing.* Sydney: Irwin. |
| **Book: more than 3 authors** | (Bond et al., 1996) | Bond, W.R., Smith, J.T., Brown, K.L. & George, M. 1996. *Management of small firms*. Sydney: McGraw-Hill. |
| **Book: no author** | (A history of Greece, 1994) | *A history of Greece.* 1994. Sydney: Irwin. |
| **Book: editor** | (Jones, 1998) | Jones, M.D. (ed.) 1998. *Management in Australia*. London: Academic Press. |
| **Book: 2 or more editors** | (Bullinger & Warnecke, 1985) | Bullinger, H.J. & Warnecke, H.J. (eds.) 1985. *Toward the factory of the future*. Berlin: Springer-Verlag. |
| **Book: translator & author** | (Smith, 2006) | Colorado, J.A. 2006. *Economic theory in the Mexican context: recent developments on the ground*. Trans. K. Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press. |
| **Book: organisation as author** | (Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics, 2001) | Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics. 2001. *Aquaculture development in Australia: a review of key economic issues.* Canberra: ABARE. |
| **Book: chapter or article in edited book** | A number of disturbing facts intrude' (Milkman, 1998: 25) | Milkman, R. 1998. The new American workplace: high road or low road? In P. Thompson & C. Warhurst (eds.). *Workplaces of the future*. London: Macmillan Press, pp. 22-34. |
| **Book: edition other than first** | (Drafke, 2009) | Drafke, M. 2009. *The human side of organizations*. 10th ed. New Jersey: Pearson/Prentice Hall. |
| **Book: reprint in a different form** | (Roget's thesaurus of English words and phrases, 1987) | *Roget's thesarus of English words and phrases.* 1987 (1852).<br><br>A simple reprint does not warrant specific mention. Where a work is reprinted in a different form, the original date of publication is generally placed in parentheses after the publication date of the reprint. |
| **eBook** | (Aghion & Durlauf, 2005) | Aghion, P. & Durlauf, S. (eds.) 2005. *Handbook of economic growth*. Amsterdam: Elsevier. Available from: Elsevier books. [4 November 2004]. |
| **eBook: chapter or article in an edited eBook** | 'Historical thinking is actually a Western perspective' (White, 2002: 112) | White, H. 2002. 'The westernization of world history.' In J. Rusen (ed.). *Western historical thinking: an intercultural debate.* New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 111-119. Available from: ACLS Humanities E-Book. [14 May 2009]. |
| **Book: different works by same author in same year** | (Bond, 1991a) (Bond, 1991b) | Bond, G. 1991a. *Business ethics.* Sydney: McGraw-Hill.<br><br>Bond, G. 1991b. *Corporate governance.* London: Irwin. |
| **Dictionary or Encyclopaedia** | The Macquarie Dictionary (2010)<br><br>(The Encyclopaedia of Australian Architecture) | Do not include in reference list |
| **Journal Articles** | | |
| **Material Type** | **In-Text Example** | **Reference List Example** |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **CMO article** | (Jennings, 1997) | Jennings, P. 1997. The performance and competitive advantage of small firms: a management perspective. *International Small Business Journal*, 15(2): 63-75. Available from: The University of Western Australia Library Course Materials Online. [1 September 2004]. |
| **Journal article: print** | (Conley & Galeson, 1998) | Conley, T.G. & Galeson, D.W. 1998. Nativity and wealth in mid-nineteenth century cities. *Journal of Economic History*, 58(2): 468-493. |
| **Journal article: electronic database** | (Liveris, 2011) | Liveris, A. 2011. Ethics as a strategy. *Leadership Excellence*, 28(2): 17-18. Available from: ProQuest. [23 June 2011]. |
| **Journal article: online only journal (no volume & and issue numbers)** | "Over a dozen writers applied before the August 31 deadline" (Bustamante, 2014, 'Public library of Cincinnati', para. 4). | Bustamante, C. 2014. Libraries welcome writers in residence. *Library Journal*. Available from: http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2014/09/industry-news/libraries-welcome-writers-in-residence/. [29 September 2014]. |
| **Journal article: online only journal (volume & issue number available)** | (Segon & Booth, 2011) | Segon, M. & Booth, C. 2011. Bribery: what do Australian managers know and what do they do? *Journal of Business Systems, Governance and Ethics*, 6(3): 15-29. Available from: http://www.jbsge.vu.edu.au/issues/vol06no3/Segon_&_Booth.pdf. [20 October 2014]. |
| **Internet/Websites** | | |
| **Material Type** | **In-Text Example** | **Reference List Example** |
| **Webpage: no author** | (Improve indigenous housing, 2007)<br><br>*Use first few words of the page title* | *Improve indigenous housing now, government told.* 2007. Available from: http://www.architecture.com.au/i-cms?page=10220. [8 February 2009]. |
| **Webpage: no date** | (Jones, n.d.) | Jones, M.D. n.d. *Commentary on indigenous housing initiatives*. Available from: http://www.architecture.com.au. [6 June 2009]. |
| **Web document** | (Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources, 2006) | Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources. 2006. *Being prepared for an influenza pandemic: a kit for small businesses*. Government of Australia. Available from: http://www.innovation.gov.au. [28 February 2009]. |
| **Website** | (Australian Securities Exchange, 2009) | Australian Securities Exchange. 2009. *Market Information*. Available from: http://www.asx.com.au/professionals/market_information/index.htm. [5 July 2009]. |
| **Blog** | (Newton, 2007) | Newton, A. 2007. Newcastle toolkit. 16 January 2007. *Angela Newton: Blog*. Available from: https://elgg.leeds.ac.uk/libajn/weblog/. [23 February 2007]. |
| **Computer software** | (OpenOffice.org, 2005) | OpenOffice.org, computer software. 2005. Available from: http://www.openoffice.org [11 January 2005]. |
| **Web based image / table / figure** | (The Lunar Interior, 2000) | *The Lunar Interior*. 2000. Available from: http://www.planetscapes.com/solar/browse/moon/moonint.jpg. [28 November 2000]. |
| **Wiki** | (Leonardo da Vinci, 2012) | 'Art Wikia', *Leonardo da Vinci, (*wiki article). October 8, 2012. Available from: http://art.wikia.com/wikia/Leonardo_Da_Vinci. [26 October 2012].<br><br>As Wikis usually feature user generated content there is usually no named author. Cite the title of the Wiki and date of last revision |
| **Facebook and Twitter** | (Smith, 2012) | Smith, P. 2012. *Social networking group, (*Facebook). 6 October. Available from: http://facebook.com. [29 October 2012]. |
| **Podcast** | (National Gallery, 2012) | National Gallery. 2012. *Episode seventy one (September 2012.* The National Gallery monthly podcast, (podcast) September 2012, Available from: http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/podcast. [26 October 2012]. |

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|---|---|---|
| **YouTube** | (The History of Project management, 2010) | The history of project management. 2010. (Video file). Available from: http://youtube.com/watch?v=C1uxCBx-UQ. [26 October 2012]. |
| **MOOCs Video** | (Forsey & May, 2013) | Forsey, M. & May, V. 2013. *Discussion with Dr Vanessa May*, video file in Developing the Sociological Imagination on UWA class2go, Semester 1, 2013, University of Western Australia. Available from: https://www.class2go.uwa.edu.au/DevSocImag/Summer2013/videos.dvm. [30 May 2013]. |
| **Cases and Legislation** | | |
| **Material Type** | **In-Text Example** | **Reference List Example** |
| **Cases** | (*R v Tang (2008)* 237 CLR 1) | *R v Tang* (2008) 237 CLR 1. |
| **Acts of Parliament** | (*Corporations Act 2001* (Cth) s 3) | *Corporations Act 2001* (Cth). |
| **Delegated Legislation** | (*Police Regulations 2003* (Vic) reg 6) | *Police Regulations 2003* (Vic) reg 6. |
| **Bills** | (Corporations Amendment Bill (No 1) 2005 (Cth)) | Corporations Amendment Bill (No 1) 2005 (Cth). |
| **Company Information** | | |
| **Material Type** | **In-Text Example** | **Reference List Example** |
| **Company report** | (Aspect Huntley, 2009) | Aspect Huntley Data Analysis. 2009. *National Australia Bank Limited company report*. Available from: Aspect Huntley Data Analysis. [20 May 2009]. |
| **Company profile** | (Datamonitor, 2009) | Datamonitor. 2009. *Wesfarmers Limited company profile*. Available from: Business Source Premier. [20 May 2009]. |
| **Financial data** | (Datastream, 2009) | Datastream. 2009. *S&PASX200 daily index data 2000-2009*. Available from: Datastream. [20 May 2009]. |
| **Datasets** | (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012) | Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2012. *Australian demographic statistics 2012*, Cat. no. 3101.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra. Available from: http://www.abs.gov.au. [26 October 2012]. |
| **Conference Papers & Proceedings** | | |
| **Material Type** | **In-Text Example** | **Reference List Example** |
| **Conference proceeding paper: print** | (Riley, 1992) | Riley, D. 1992. 'Industrial relations in Australian education', in *Contemporary Australasian industrial relations: proceedings of the sixth AIRAANZ conference*, ed. D Blackmur, AIRAANZ, Sydney, 124-140. |
| **Conference proceeding paper: electronic** | (Fan, Gordon & Pathak, 2000) | Fan, W., Gordon, M.D. & Pathak, R. 2000. 'Personalization of search engine services for effective retrieval and knowledge management', *Proceedings of the twenty-first international conference on information systems*, 20-34. Available from: ACM Portal: ACM Digital Library. [24 June 2004]. |
| **Conference proceeding paper: unpublished** | (Brown & Caste, 1990) | Brown, S. & Caste, V. 2004. 'Integrated obstacle detection framework'. Paper presented at the *IEEE Intelligent Vehicles Symposium*, IEEE, Detroit, MI. |
| **Newspapers** | | |
| **Material Type** | **In-Text Example** | **Reference List Example** |
| **Newspaper: print** | (Ionesco, 2001) | Ionesco, J. 2001. Federal election: new Chip in politics, *The Advertiser* 23 October, p. 10. |
| **Newspaper: electronic database** | (Meryment, 2006) | Meryment, E. 2006. Distaff winemakers raise a glass of their own to their own, *The Australian* 7 October, p. 5. Available from: Factiva. [2 February 2007]. |

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| **Newspaper: from a website** | (Hilts, 1999) | Hilts, P.J. 1999. 'In forecasting their emotions, most people flunk out', *The New York Times* 16 February. Available from: http://www.nytimes.com. [19 February 2000]. |
| **Newspaper: no author** | (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 7 January 2011: 12) | Not required. |
| **Multimedia** | | |
| **Material Type** | **In-Text Example** | **Reference List Example** |
| **DVD** | (Art Nation, 2010) | *Art Nation.* 2010. (DVD). Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Corporation. |
| **Television programme** | (Crystal, 1993) | Crystal, L. (executive producer) 1993. *The MacNeil/Lehrer news hour* (television broadcast) 11 October 1993, New York and Washington DC, Public Broadcasting Service. |
| **Music track from an album** | (Shocked, 1992) | Shocked, M. 1992. 'Over the waterfall', on *Arkansas Traveller* (CD), New York: Polygram Music. |
| **Standards & Patents** | | |
| **Material Type** | **In-Text Example** | **Reference List Example** |
| **Patent** | (Cookson, 1985) | Cookson, A.H. 1985. *Particle trap for compressed gas insulated transmission systems*, US Patent 4554399. |
| **Patent: Retrieved From a Database** | (McCallum, 2008) | McCallum, J.M. (2008). *Method for and composition of excipient suitable for use in herbal formulations and formulations derived therefrom*, Australian Patent AU 2008100919. Available from: SciFinder Scholar. [8 December 2008]. |
| **Standard: retrieved from a database** | (Standards Australia, 2008) | Standards Australia 2008. *Personal floatation devices - General requirements*, AS 4758.1-2008. Available from: Australian Standards. [1 December 2008]. |
| **Standard: published** | (Standards Australia/New Zealand Standard, 1994) | Standards Australia 1994. *Information processing - text and office systems - office document architecture (ODA) and interchange format: part 10: formal specifications*, AS/NZS 3951.10:1994, Standards Australia, NSW. |
| **CMO** | | |
| **Material Type** | **In-Text Example** | **Reference List Example** |
| **CMO article** | (Jennings, 1997) | Jennings, P. 1997. The performance and competitive advantage of small firms: a management perspective. *International Small Business Journal*, 15(2): 63-75. Available from: The University of Western Australia Library Course Materials Online. [1 September 2004]. |
| **Lecture Notes** | | |
| **Material Type** | **In-Text Example** | **Reference List Example** |
| **Lecture notes** | (Foster, 2004) | Foster, T. 2004. *Balance sheets*, lecture notes distributed in Financial Accounting 101 at The University of Western Australia, Crawley on 2 November 2005. |
| **Course reader** | (Graber, 2007) | Graber, D. 1997. 'Elections in the television age' in *Mass media and American politics*, CQ Press, Washington DC, p. 228, COMM2001 Communication and Mass Media Course Reader, Semester 2, 2012, University of Western Australia. |
| **Theses** | | |
| **Material Type** | **In-Text Example** | **Reference List Example** |
| **Thesis: unpublished** | (Hos, 2005) | Hos, J.P. 2005. *Mechanochemically synthesized nanomaterials for intermediate temperature solid oxide fuel cell membranes.* PhD thesis, University of Western Australia. |

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| **Thesis: published** | (May, 2007) | May, B. 2007. *A survey of radial velocities in the zodiacal dust cloud.* Bristol UK, Canopus Publishing. |
| **Thesis: retrieved from a database** | (Cincura, 2012) | Cincura, M. 2012. *Beyond profit-centric: transcendent business modelling*. PhD thesis, Swinburne University of Technology. Available from: Trove. [12 August 2013]. |
| **Tables and figures** | | |
| **Material Type** | **In-Text Example** | **Reference List Example** |
| **All or part of a table, figure, or data used in text: from a print journal** | *Note*. From [*or* The data in column # are from] 'Evaluating the effectiveness of best management practices using dynamic modelling' (Ackerman & Stein, 2008: 634) | Ackerman, D. & Stein, E.D. 2008. Evaluating the effectiveness of best management practices using dynamic modelling. *Journal of Environmental Engineering*, 134(8): 629-639.<br><br>*Add in-text citation to the text of the illustration's caption.* |
| **All or part of a table, figure or data used in text: from a book** | *Note*. From [*or* The data in column # are from] *Thermophysical properties of fluids* p. 113 (Assael, 1998: 70) | Assael, M. 1998. *Thermophysical properties of fluids.* London: Imperial College Press.<br><br>*Add in-text citation to the text of the illustration's caption.* |
| **All or part of a table, figure or data used in text: from the web** | *Note*. From [*or* The data in column # are from] *International merchandise imports Australia, January 2009* (ABS, 2009) | Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009, *International merchandise imports Australia, January 2009* (No. 5439.0). Available from: http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/5439.0?OpenDocument . [6 March 2014].<br><br>*Add in-text citation to the text of the illustration's caption.* |
| **Personal communication** | | |
| **Material Type** | **In-Text Example** | |
| **Telephone call, interview, e-mail, etc.** | *If the information you are referencing was obtained by a personal communication such as a telephone call, interview or email, this should be documented in the text and are not added to the reference list. If desired you can add the abbreviation* pers.comm. *to the reference.*<br><br>• When interviewed on 6 June 2008, Mr M Ward confirmed...<br>• (Mrs S Byrne 2012, pers.comm., 6 June) | |
| **Citing information someone else has cited** | | |
| **Material Type** | **In-Text Example** | **Reference List Example** |
| **Citing information that someone else has cited** | (O'Reilly, cited in Byrne, 2008) | Byrne, A. 2008. Web 2.0 strategies in libraries and information services. *The Australian Library Journal*, 57(4): 365-376.<br><br>*In the reference list provide the details of the author who has done the* ***citing****.* |

## Revisions and Proofreading

As in any other piece of academic writing, it's essential to redraft, edit and proofread your research proposal before you submit it. If you have the opportunity, ask a supervisor or colleague for feedback. For the best chance of approval, you might want to consider using a professional proofreading service to get rid of language errors, check your proposal's structure, and improve your academic style.

## REFERENCES


Bwisa,H. 2018. The basics of writing a statement of the problem for your research proposal. https://www.editage.com/insights/the-basics-of-writing-a-statement-of-the-problem-for-your-research-proposal. https://doi.org/10.34193/EI-A-5275.

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McLeod, S. A. (2020, March 28). *How to Synthesize Written Information*. Simply Psychology. https://www.simplypsychology.org/synthesising.html

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