

Guidelines for Research Proposal Paper (July 2017)

PhD Program in Early Childhood Education

You have now successfully completed your written and oral comprehensive exam – congratulations, you are a PhD candidate! Next, you will develop a Dissertation Proposal, following APA (see *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th edition). *First*, the following guidelines specify the major elements for your proposal, which you will develop in consultation with your Dissertation Advisor/Chair and Committee members. *Second*, you will orally present the finalized proposal to your committee for review, discussion and approval. *Third*, upon receiving approval, you will proceed to obtain Oakland University IRB approval and to conduct the study. Although IRB does not require a literature review, you may copy and paste other specifics from this proposal into the IRB proposal. In writing their proposals, many students have uploaded this guidelines document and used it as a template. See the Rubric Attachment, which you and your advisor may find useful for planning the study. It will also be used in reviewing your final study approval.

Working Title

First, select a working title reflecting the topic of the study and its key focus. The title may be changed up to the time you submit the final dissertation.

Organization of the Proposal

In your proposal, you should consider using the headings or similar headings specified in these Guidelines, and you may use further subheadings as needed, especially in the Method section. Again, the APA manual is helpful with suggestions about headings and subheadings (see Levels of Headings), and there are various ways that headings are useful in structuring a research proposal. Also check professional research periodicals or journals for ideas on the use of headings, e.g., the following:

American Educational Research Journal

American Psychologist

Child Development

Developmental Psychologist

Early Childhood Research Quarterly

As stated above, the Introduction and Literature Review sections below may be largely drawn from your in-depth, qualifying exam paper. You may need to include

additional content as your focus becomes more defined, with advisement from your advisor/chair and committee members. You may decide that you want to use the eventual Oakland University dissertation format as a frame for your proposal. See OU web page (current Graduate Students) for Theses/Dissertation Documents and Templates:

<https://wwwp.oakland.edu/grad/current-graduate-students/doctoral/>

In general, when you write your dissertation, the format will include **Chapter One Introduction**, which establishes the need for the research focus and provides an overview of the most relevant knowledge from relevant theory, research, policies and practices and the need for the focus. The end of the chapter will narrow the focus toward one or more research questions. **Chapter Two** will be an in-depth **Review of the Literature**, and **Chapter Three** will be the proposed **Method**. You can choose to use this formatting of Chapters One, Two and Three for your dissertation proposal or do so at a later point in the dissertation process. Either way, use the headers shown below for your dissertation proposal.

Introduction

- Discuss the overall problem/need that is the focus of your proposal.
- What is its purpose?
- What problem(s) or need(s) does it address?

Review of the Literature

- Present a section on the relevant knowledge base regarding your focus. In this review of the literature, include a description and discussion of the most relevant major theoretical perspectives, research studies, and publications regarding practices and public policies (if relevant). The sources for your discussion of relevant policies would be documents from government agencies (e.g., legislation, government reports), policy organizations (NAEYC), and foundations or research organizations (e.g., Children's Defense Fund, Urban Institute).
- In your discussion, highlight details of the more major relevant research and any policies/legislation that you think are the conceptual and empirical foundations of your proposed study. Point out what has been studied, the

methods employed, the key findings, and what needs to be examined, i.e., the gaps in the knowledge base.

- You may find that one or more tables will be useful in presenting and discussing the key studies. For example, such a table may include a row for each study and specifics about the study in the table columns:
 - Column A, authors & dates
 - Column B, research questions
 - Column C, the study design or approach
 - Columns D, study participants (numbers and types of study participants) and numbers and types of study groups, if applicable
 - Column E, assessment approaches/instruments or tests
 - Column F, measures or other variables and/or codes, and
 - Column G, key study findings & implications.
- The table(s) would likely be in landscape format and may be included within the text or in an Appendix. See example proposals from other students for ideas on developing such tables both for the proposal and/or for presentation at the oral.
- End the Introduction/Literature with a paragraph stating the specific research question(s), hypotheses(s), or problem statement that will be studied. The research questions should proceed logically from the review of the literature.

The Proposed Approach/Design

- In general, explain briefly how the proposed study approach or design will address the problem/need.
- **Briefly**, give an overview of what will take place in this study:
 - What study participants and/or groups of study participants will be included in the research, e.g., given pre- and post-testing, observed, interviewed, respond to a survey on one or more times?
 - Will study participants and/or groups of study participants be given an intervention/treatment/professional training? How often and under what circumstances?

- Who will provide the intervention/treatment/professional training?

Method

- This section will include a number of levels of headings (see method sections of research reports and articles in journals for examples). The method section will typically include Level 1 and Level 2 headings and also may add in two or more Level 3 headings (under the Level 2 headings) as needed for clarification. Sometimes Level 4 headings are necessary to include (under Level 3 headings). See APA Manual (see levels of headings).
- Explain and cite references regarding the methods you are proposing, where applicable.

Study Participants/Settings

- Explain how the sample will be achieved (e.g., how a population will be sampled and the potential study participants who are to be identified). Or, if you will be using an existing sample, explain how the sample had been formed or selected.
- Include a description of how potential study participants are to be recruited and invited to participate. What is the sampling approach you will employ to achieve your study sample? How many study participants are expected to agree overall and in study groups, if applicable?
- Describe the final study sample (or target sample to be achieved), including the expected demographic characteristics (age, gender, socioeconomic background, and so on) of the study individuals or study groups; number of schools or other settings (you may need to use separate subheadings); numbers in study groups, if applicable.
- In an Appendix include IRB Letter of Consent for study participants. See IRB for guidelines.

- Describe any setting that will be involved in your study in some way (e.g., to recruit parents, students, or teachers from a school or early childhood center; to conduct professional development sessions). Explain why each setting was selected. Attach a letter of cooperation from an appropriate administrator of the center or school district or other agency. See IRB for guidelines.

Intervention/Treatment/Training

- Include descriptions of the projected *selection* and any *training* of data collectors (e.g., teachers, trained observers or examiners).
- Include descriptions of any program approach, treatment, intervention or professional training that is instrumental to your study. Specify who will provide the intervention/treatment or training and how the content and process will be documented or assessed for fidelity. You may want to include descriptions that are more detailed (e.g., a professional development manual) in an Appendix.

Assessment/Instruments to be Administered/Types of Data to be Collected

- Identify and describe *each* instrument, test, and/or assessment method to be used (rating scales, observational techniques, tests, interviews, focus groups, questionnaires). (Cite references.) It is helpful to place each assessment method separately under a subheading, and then provide the description and a few examples under that heading. Note that some more detail may be given in an appendix, but there must also be some description in the main part of the proposal. For each assessment method/instrument/test/approach, provide a rationale for why you are proposing to employ it in your study. Provide any existing findings on the validity and reliability of each assessment approach.
- Include description and discussion of any instrument or assessment approach you have developed or will be developed. Explain the relevance of the assessment to the research questions. Explain how you have developed or will develop items, questions, observational ratings and so on with regard to the study's specific research questions. Explain how you plan to determine validity and reliability of an instrument or assessment approach. (Cite appropriate assessment models and references.)

- Attach in an Appendix any instrument, interview or focus group protocol and questions that you have developed. Each should have its own title.

Procedures

- Provide the specific steps and projected timelines for the study, e.g. contacting schools, meeting with administrators, identifying potential study participants, recruiting study participants and so on. You may find it helpful to include a table of these procedural steps.
- Include the anticipated times of assessment and intervention, if applicable. It is likely that the specifics of the schedule may need to be revised as they are worked out with the study settings, participants and personnel.

Analysis

Major Variables/Measures

- Identify and describe the key variables or measures (e.g., reading test scores; mathematics test scores; attendance; attitudes toward learning; frequency of pro-social behavior) to be derived from the data to be collected, with regard to the research questions, hypotheses or problem statement(s).
- Describe how the study data will be compiled, coded and entered into a computer program, as applicable.
- Explain how you plan to analyze the data.
- Describe specifically the statistical (including statistical tests, if appropriate) or other analytic approaches that will be applied to the data or subsets of the data, as appropriate.

Results and Discussion

- In a proposal, you can only predict your expected outcomes, if at all, but you should discuss what you expect to learn from your study to address the research questions, hypotheses, or problem focus.

- You should also discuss what the implications or usefulness of various outcomes would be for the knowledge base, for practice, and for policy making.

References

- Include only those references cited in the proposal.

Rubric Attachment		
Rubric for Assessing Dissertation Proposal Development & Defense (Jan 15, 2016)		
Name of Student: _____		
Aspects of Manuscript	Developing Areas	Comments
Introduction/Rationale for Study/Program		
Coverage includes major theories, issues & studies		
Includes critiques of theories & studies		
Proposes useful constructs for integrating & interpreting knowledge base of literature		
Reports and critiques relevant methodologies		
Research Question(s) (or problem focus)		
Follows logically from literature reviewed		
Identifies gaps in knowledge base for focus		
Proposes to better understand, describe, and/or test or predict		
If applicable, proposes testable hypothesis (hypotheses)		
Organized and clear		
Method		
Program/study approach well-grounded in theory & research		
Describes specifics of setting(s)		
Explains rationale for program/study sample		
Explains specifics of recruitment approach		
Describes consent procedures		

Provides descriptions of each instrument, method or test		
Reports on reliability and validity of instruments, methods, tests		
Provides rationale for each type of data collected/included		
Includes a feasible study/program timeline		
Identifies key steps in the procedure		
Results		
Discusses significance of possible results		