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| **Prepared by:** [Researcher First Name][Researcher Last Name] |

Title

This should be clear and concise, while leaving the reader in no doubt as to your field of study. A good title structure can often be “Short Title: Longer Explanation of Your Field”. Your academic institution may have a preferred format for the title, or even a title page. Find out before you submit your proposal. If there is no preferred format, keep it simple and clear, and use a ‘serif’ font that is easily legible.​

**Example**

<Main title: what I am trying to find out in this project>

<Academic Institution>

<Subject Area>

[Supervisor First Name] [Supervisor Last Name] (if you already have one) <[Researcher First Name] [Researcher Last Name]/ student number>

1. Abstract

100-200 words. This summarizes the central theme of your research. For this, try to use concise and clipped language, which is academic without being over-wordy and verbose. The abstract needs to be entirely your own words, as every abstract will be completely different depending on your topic. Like the rest of the document, apart from block quotations, it should be double-spaced and laid out clearly.

2. Contents

Depending on the length of your research proposal, you may wish to include a contents page for the proposal itself (not for your main research project: suggested contents for this is included in your Proposed Chapter Outline, section 9), as follows (add page numbers / subsections when you know them, depending on your research). As you introduce sub-sections into your different sections, number them accordingly e.g., subsections of the literature review could be numbered 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, etc.

**Example**

Abstract…………………………….pn

Contents……………………………pn

Introduction………………………..pn

Literature Review…………………pn

Notion of Original Research……pn

Key Assertions / Objectives…..pn

Research Methods………………pn

Analysis……………………………pn

Proposed Chapter Outline……..pn

Research Limitations………….pn

Proposed Timescale…………..pn

References/ Bibliography…….pn

3. Introduction

200-400 words. Unlike the abstract, this is not a summary of everything you are about to say: you can afford to grab your readers’ attention. Make a surprise beginning, perhaps a quote from someone who inspires you on this topic, and show your knowledge of the research area (include if you like your previous research experience in this field: you can afford to be personal in this section) and why it is relevant to today’s world.

4. Literature review

Length can vary immensely, but probably 300-1500 words or more, depending on the nature of your research. This is one of the most important sections of your research proposal. It demonstrates that you know your field, who the key research players are in it, what has been said in the past and what is being said at the moment. You will want to mention, and where appropriate quote from, key works in your area.

This is the section that requires the most preliminary research: make sure you spend some time in an academic library and using search engines for relevant academic papers before presenting this. You do not need to discuss every work in your area, but you need to present a competent outline, and, especially if this is a proposal for doctoral research, you need to be sure that no-one else has already done the same project. A good way of presenting a literature review coherently is in the form of a narrative, which can either be chronological or thematic.

**Example**

There has been a (small / considerable / state value here) amount of previous academic research in this field.

I will outline how the understanding of (has developed over the last number of) years.

(Insert chronological narrative, remembering to introduce key players, dates, and academic works, and end with the state of the field as it is today.)

(For a thematic narrative) I will outline the major themes that are of relevance in this field, and go through them each in turn: • (use a bulleted list to outline what themes / topics you are planning on covering)

After your bulleted list, you can use the themes from your list as subtitles to split up your literature review. Put them in bold, like this. You could also add them as subsections in your contents page.

Under each subtitle, describe the state of the field of research in this area, including the most important researchers and works in this area.

5. Notion of original research

Length varies, but probably similar length to literature review. This is where you sell your research proposal to the reader. You need to explain, clearly and simply, how your research will complement the field you have just described in your literature review: what you will add, how it fills an existing gap, why the academic world would benefit from your research, etc.

6. Key Assertions/Objectives

One sentence for each question/assertion. This is really part of the ‘notion of original research’ section. A good way of making your research aim clear is to state a clear research question, and back it up with 2-4 specific assertions or objectives.

**Example**

My central research question is as follows:

<insert research question here, in bold>

In the light of this, I will make the following observations / assertions: <insert observations / assertions here, in bulleted list>

7. Research methods

Approx. 50-1000 words depending on the nature of your research. This is where you explain how and where you plan to carry out your research. This will vary hugely depending on your subject. Will you be researching in libraries and archives? Which ones hold the books and documents you will need? Will you need to travel? If so, where? Will your research involve extensive field-work? How and where? State whether you will plan to use different methods of data collection, and if so what they will be.

Do you need to be in a laboratory? Will you be using qualitative or quantitative collection of data? Do you have the necessary skills and qualifications to undertake your research (for instance foreign languages, statistical analysis, laboratory training, etc.)? If not, what are your plans to acquire these skills (note: many postgraduate institutions offer considerable support in the acquisition of new skills necessary to perform research, but this will need discussing at the proposal stage)?

8. Analysis

Approx. 50-300 words. Once you have collected your data, what do you plan to do with it? Again, depending on the nature of your research, this section could be anywhere from one or two sentences to several paragraphs.

9. Proposed chapter outline

Probably less than 200 words, unless you have a very detailed plan already in mind. Note: this is like a preliminary contents page, but it does not need to be very specific, and can suggest sections rather than chapters at this stage, but the academics reading your proposal will be impressed to know that you have some idea how you may wish to present your work, and that you have some

way in mind of translating your research to paper.

**Example**

1. <title of your first chapter>

<explanation of your first chapter contents: one sentence>

1.1 <first subsection of your first chapter>

1.2 <second subsection of your first chapter>

2. <title of your second chapter>

<explanation of your second chapter contents: one sentence>

2.1 <first subsection of your second chapter> 2.2 <second subsection of your second chapter>

2.2.1 <smaller section>

2.2.2 <another small section> <title of your third chapter>

<explanation of your third chapter contents: one sentence>

10. Research limitations

Approx. 50-300 words. This section states everything you won’t be able to do in your research. It is surprisingly important, as it shows that you can recognize the limited scale of your work. Every project needs distinct limiting factors in order to be manageable.

**Example**

Naturally, the scope of this project is limited. This section describes specific limitations. <add limitations here!>

11. Proposed Timescale

Approx. 50-300 words. This section is optional, but may be helpful to show your potential supervisors that you are being realistic and recognize that your project has limits. It also will help you to know the scale of your work in the preliminary stages of planning, and help you to have realistic expectations of yourself.

**Example**

I predict that this research project will take <x> months / years. I propose a rough timescale, as follows:

<here, makes a list of tasks that will need completing as part of your research project, and how long you predict each will take in terms of weeks or months. End with a final count of months. If you have a predicted start date, you can begin with this and work towards a proposed end date.>

12. References / Bibliography

The reference list should always begin on a new page. Depending on your subject, there will probably be a specific set referencing pattern for written work (Chicago, Harvard, MLA, Social Sciences?). Before you start writing, make sure you know what the convention for your subject area is, learn it and stick to it. There are a wide variety of different referencing conventions so it is important to make sure you find the correct one and are consistent.

This will make doing your research proposal and future research a lot easier. Depending on your subject, your referencing may involve in-text citations or footnotes. Either way, your proposal will need a full reference list or bibliography at the end, including all of the secondary works you have mentioned in your literature review and primary sources (if applicable).

You do not, however, need to include work that you have read in preparation but not used or mentioned in your work. Make sure this is correctly formatted: plenty of style guides for each referencing style are available online. Also remember to lay out your reference list in alphabetical order by author’s surname.

[Researcher First Name] [Researcher Last Name]