

# Structure of Synopsis

## Initial PhD Research

Students are expected to submit an initial research proposal at the time of application. The purpose of this paper is to assist the students to prepare the proposal. The final proposal is usually developed under supervision in the first semester of candidature and, therefore, the initial one is necessarily brief.

## Purpose

The initial proposal serves two purposes. First, it allows the School Doctoral Committee (SDC) to assess the degree of preparedness of the student including a preliminary judgment on the potential scholarship of the student. Second, it allows the SDC to assign suitable supervisors for the project if at all. If suitable supervisors cannot be found, the application has to be rejected. Some research projects may require material resources other than what JGU can afford to provide.

## Length

The research proposal with the application is not expected to be a fully developed one. Students will be required to develop a detailed research proposal in the first year of their studies. In fact, a detailed proposal at the time of application will not be possible because the research proposal evolves as the student reads on the subject of the research. Many PhD students complete theses that are markedly different from what they set out to do initially. That said, applicants are expected to have a clear sense of the general research project that they will complete during their studies at JGU. The expected length of the proposal is about 2500 words. The proposal may be double spaced in A4 Paper. About 6 to 10 pages are sufficient. It is difficult to specify precise composition and length as some proposals can be long and fuzzy, and others short and clear.

## Structure

The structure of the initial proposal varies slightly from one to another. The Brief proposal shall however contain the following titles given below

- a. *Brief Overview***
- b. *Research Questions***
- c. *Review of Literature***
- d. *Research Methodology***
- e. *Chapter Outline***

But, at the same time, you would notice that many contain the following elements, although the order of the parts may differ slightly. Therefore, the following are not prescriptive; students may modify it to suit their particular research project or study.

### Title/ Brief Overview.

The title should immediately give a clear idea of the proposed research project or the study. Try as much as you can to include the key words in the title. Avoid any figurative or 2 idiomatic expressions in the title. The title should be descriptive and focused without being overly wordy.

## Introduction/ Research Questions

Every research project is aimed at solving a problem. The introduction gives the necessary background to the research problem so that the reader can understand the context of what you plan to do. Sometimes, the problem is linked to the available data or the lack of them, making a case for the significance of the research. You should expressly write the purpose of the research and, if possible, the research questions that would be answered by the study. Most research is conducted to test a hypothesis or to seek answers to questions that you have raised. The introduction section must outline the significance or the rationale of the study. Unless the study is seen to advance the knowledge in an area, the SDC will not approve your application. Therefore, in this section you have to convince the reader that your study will not only answer the research questions or solve the problem you have raised, further the understanding in the area, and possibly lead to further research projects. Try to persuade the reader of the importance and the benefits of the project.

## Research Methodology.

In this section you will normally write the detailed steps you would take to find the answers to the questions you have posed. The steps taken are sometimes preceded by considerations of theoretical and/or conceptual framework and how these considerations fit and guide your methods. You may like to include the dependent and independent variables, the sampling you would adopt, the data sources and the instruments used to collect the data. You may have to describe why you chose one method over another and one instrument over another. If you are going to use structured interviews, for example, you will describe how you will develop and pilot them.

## Analysis of data.

This section describes how the data you collected using the methods proposed will be analysed to answer your research questions. You can mention the statistical or data analysis methods and packages you will be using if your data is mainly quantitative. If your research design incorporates elements of qualitative methods, you may describe what you would do to the data to tease out the conclusions.

## Literature Review.

Most students would conduct a brief review of relevant literature or, at least, outline the areas of literature that they wish to review. The purpose of the literature review is to demonstrate your knowledge of the topic and the key issues regarding the topic. The review increases your familiarity with the topic and identifies the implications for your project. At the same time, it helps to place your study in the larger context of previous studies. The information is useful to the researcher in designing the study to avoid pitfalls and replication of previous studies. More importantly, it informs the HDC that the study is new, useful and extends the available knowledge on the topic – a requirement of any higher degree.

## Time frame for study.

In some proposals the periods of time you would be engaging in various activities of the project are listed. This informs the SDC that the students is aware of the magnitude of the tasks and has a plan of action.

#### Limitations and delimitations.

The limitations describe the practical or theoretical limits that are placed on the study, which are beyond your control. For example, if you wish to study obesity of grade-7 children in the Maldives, it would not be possible to get data of the relevant cohort of the whole population. You may have to sample islands. Delimitations are what you wish to exclude for some reasons. They are the limits that you determine. Both limitations and delimitations restrict the conclusions you can draw from your data.

#### References.

This section lists the references you have cited in your proposal. In some instances, a bibliography is included in which case literature that would be useful to the study are listed. References and bibliographies are not identical.

#### Modifications and page count

Initial proposals are written in a variety of formats. The above is for illustration only and may be adapted freely. Sometimes, the literature view and the limitations are discussed in the Introduction section. Methodology, Limitations and delimitations and Data analysis may be grouped together. Separate sections may be created for Research questions or Significance of study. Depending on the project, a section on Resources required may become useful. Often, the particular research project determines what headings you would use to structure your proposal. Beginning research students are often anxious about page count. Again, the number of pages depends on the project. But as a guide, since the proposal is to be between 500 and 2000 words, we may suggest 1.5 pages for introduction, 2.5 pages for methodology, 3.5 pages for literature review and 1.5 for the rest. But, as you are free to merge different sections such numbers may be more distractive than helpful.