

# Successful Study Guide

## Successful Dissertation Proposals

This leaflet outlines the first step in writing your dissertation, the dissertation proposal. It is a summary of the information you will find in the online Successful Study Guide.

**Always check if your faculty has any specific requirements.**

Remember that you can get lots more study tips and resources from the Successful Study Guide in SOL.

### Writing your dissertation proposal

#### What is it and why do you need one?

A dissertation proposal is intended to make you think. A dissertation is a major piece of work and you cannot just launch yourself straight into it without a little planning. This is where you draw up your plan and it helps if you approach it in a structured way. Your proposal should be:

- Planned
- Structured

#### Are you ready?

You cannot write your proposal until you have prepared the ground. Before starting your proposal you should have:

- Chosen a topic relevant to your programme of study.
- Conducted preliminary research.
- Decided on the primary research question (this will form your dissertation title).
- Checked the feasibility of your topic with your supervisor.

### The essential elements

What are the essential elements of a dissertation proposal?

- Title
- Introduction
- Aims and objectives
- Methodology
- Literature survey
- Scope and restraints
- Resources
- Outline of sections/chapters
- Timetable
- References

#### Title

You need a working title to focus on throughout your research. It may be that you will improve on the wording later but make the title you begin with mean something.

You may wish to consider that future employers may ask about the topic of your dissertation. It might be worth thinking to the future in order to come up with something that will gain their interest.

#### Introduction

Here you will set out your reasons for undertaking this particular study. You need to set your ideas into a theoretical/academic context. Your statement should:

- Outline the problem - what is the key issue?
- Explain why you think this is worth investigating
- Describe the nature and purpose of your research
- Indicate what you hope to achieve.

## The essential elements

### Aims and objectives

The primary focus of your research project is usually expressed in terms of aims and objectives.

Many students find it difficult to understand the difference between them. In an academic context there is a clear distinction between the terms.

- **Aim** = intention or aspiration - what you hope to achieve
- **Objective** = goal - a step on the way to meeting the aim - how you will achieve it.

**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.

When writing your objectives try to use strong positive statements.

### Methodology

Here you should explain what methods you used in researching and developing your report.

The general idea is that, should someone else choose to carry out the same or a very similar type of study, they should be able to understand and copy your methods from your descriptions.

You will need to discuss with your project supervisor the extent and level of detail required; original research will obviously require a more detailed description than a project based solely on secondary research.

The following sample statements are intended to give a flavour of the approach one could take but they are not to be assumed to represent a complete methodology.

### Literature survey

This section describes the existing and established theory and research in your report area. You are providing a context for your work.

This section can be used to show where you are filling a perceived gap in the existing theory or knowledge, or you are proposing something that goes against or is controversial to existing ideas.

You must accurately reference all sources mentioned here and give a full citation in the Reference List.

Sometimes the literature survey can be a discrete piece of writing that is set and marked separately. It is also common practice to embed your literature survey in the main body of your dissertation. This will depend on the preferences of your department or tutor. Make sure you check whether to include this separately or not.

### References

The reference list at the end of your work demonstrates the depth of your research. It also acknowledges your sources of information, protecting you against the serious charge of plagiarism (passing off others' ideas as your own).

If you have included a literature survey this is where you list all of your research reading.

If you have presented your literature survey separately, you will have still had to refer to some aspects of that reading in your introduction (statement of the problem). Those aspects must be cited and referenced here.

#### Further help

In the Successful Study Guide on Solent Online Learning you will find help on the following related subjects:

**Successful Referencing**

**Successful Research**

**Successful Academic Writing**