

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION



RESEARCH AND POSTGRADUATE CENTRE

GUIDELINES ON THE WRITING OF POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH PROPOSALS

JULY 2006

INTRODUCTION

These guidelines have been developed for prospective postgraduate candidates who are about to enter into the research phase of their studies in an attempt to ensure that they embark on their research with a clear focus and in the right direction. In preparing their research proposals for MSc/MPhil/DPhil prospective candidates should consult with Heads of relevant Departments who will refer them to lecturers and Professors with relevant experience and expertise. In scientific research, the immediate products of the research are publications either as thesis or research papers for refereed journals. In order to market your research work, style of writing and quality of content are important. Good packaging cannot make up for poor content but poor packaging can mask the quality of the content.

The research proposal should be submitted to the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee through the departmental head who will scrutinize it on its feasibility depth of study and appropriateness in relation to the student's study programme. The outcome of the evaluation should be communicated to the student through the departmental head. If approved, the student together with his/her supervisors has to effect any changes recommended by the committee before he/she presents a seminar of the research proposal and then commence the research project. If the project has been rejected, a new proposal has to be submitted with a period specified by the faculty Higher Degrees Committee. For all approved research proposals, the faculty Higher Degrees Committee should submit a copy of the proposal to the Postgraduate Centre.

TENTATIVE TITLE

The title of the research proposals should be clear and concise reflecting the content accurately and adequately. From the title, one should be able to infer clearly the subject of the research. The title should avoid abbreviations, formulas and being flashy. This means that the title should be self-explanatory.

INTRODUCTION

A research proposal should contain an Introduction which provides background information and a setting to the problem of the proposed research. In this section the applicant reviews the key literature pertaining to the research problem indicates what information has already been published on the subject (citing specific authors, where appropriate), what gaps of knowledge still exists and what additional research needs to be done. Here the candidate should demonstrate that he/she has comprehensively mastered the theoretical frame of his/her research area and has clearly presented a statement of the hypotheses which will be tested in the proposed research or which will guide the research. Often it is useful to divide the Introduction section into sub-headings such as:

- ❖ **General Introduction:** identifying research concerns and defining the problem area.
- ❖ **Literature Review:** focusing attention on the findings of the other researchers on the subject or principal theme of the research project.
- ❖ **Statement of the Problem/Justification:** identifying particular problems the study will help to solve including an elaboration on the significance of the problem, anticipated contribution to knowledge, and/or socioeconomic progress.
- ❖ **Hypothesis:** specify questions your research is designed to answer.
- ❖ **Objectives questions:** state the overall objective of the study. Specify the specific objectives of the study that will be used to accomplish the research questions.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The purpose of this section is to present in a simple and direct manner as possible what is going to be done, when and how. The proposal should provide all the information needed to allow another researcher to actually repeat your study. Each specific objective requires a clearly stated methodology that will be implemented by the researcher in order to achieve it.

1. A research proposal should contain a section that gives details on the methodologies, the theoretical approaches and the materials proposed to be used when conducting the research. A choice between qualitative and quantitative approaches should be made here. The section should be arranged in a chronological order such as:
2. Where relevant:
 - (i) the locations where the research will be carried out should also be stated
 - (ii) particular instruments to be used (e.g. animals, plants, observations, interviews, questionnaires) their outlines and specifications as well as the resources available to the candidate should be presented.
 - (iii) if the data are to be collected through sampling, the research design and the sampling procedures should be described.
 - (iv) If standard methods are to be used, full reference to them should be given. In the event that new research methods have been developed by applicant, these should be described in sufficient detail and
 - (v) The data analysis plan and statistical packages to be used should be indicated.
 - (vi) The botanical names of plants and animals should be italicized.
 - (vii) The SI system should be used for measurements.

BUDGET

Where practical, a budget for the research to be undertaken should be presented.

WORK PLAN

The research proposal should have a detailed work plan that shows what is to be done, when it will commence and end. Each specific objective should have its own detailed work plan that indicates the activities to be carried out and their time frame.

REFERENCES

At the end of the proposal, the applicant should prepare a bibliography of the references cited in the text following guidelines approved by the respective Departments e.g. arranging names of all the authors cited in the text in alphabetical order and giving full details of the journals/books cited and where and when published (including page numbers).