

Table of Content

STEP 3 - TITLE REGISTRATION (AND PROPOSAL)

Training in Research Design

Proposal Development

- Putting together the proposal document
- Proposal Templates
- Proposal Cover Page
- Proposal abstract
- Literature review & writing
- Research gap, problem, aim, objectives
- Methodology
- Rigour
- Ethics
- Structure
- Structure of the report
- Bibliography
- Addendums
- Proposal completeness

Administrative Processes

- Expectation about a post-graduate study
- Administrative processes

STEP 3

- TITLE & PROPOSAL -

Training in Research Design



All research requires title registration within six months after the development of the research proposal. This section provides information on the proposal development process and concepts.

It is critical to attend this training or something similar. This training will help you conceptualise your study.

Follow the link to learn more about the Short Learning Programme in Research Design developed by the Optentia Research unit.

Optentia: Short Learning program in Research Design

The following Short Learning Programme is available for post-graduate students at the NWU to ensure a good overview of Research Design. Working through this material will enable you to make decisions on your research project and design your research proposal.

Study unit 1: Introduction to Science and Research
Study unit 2: Research Questions and Programmes
Study unit 3: The Research Process at NWU
Study unit 4: Basic Aspects of Research
Study unit 5: Literature and Resources
Study unit 6: Basics of Qualitative Research
Study unit 7: Basics of Quantitative Research
Study unit 8: Basics of Mixed Methods Research
Study unit 9: Data Analysis
Study unit 10: Writing and Publishing Research



View previous course participant's feedback by watching this video below.

Proposal development

All research require title registration within six months after development of the research proposal. This section provide information on the proposal development process and concepts included.



Putting together the proposal document

Now that you have successfully completed your training in research methodology it is time to put your proposal together and prepare it for review by the selected scientific review committee. The aim of this section is to provide you with additional resources and refer you back to the relevant training sections you have done in your Research Methodology training. These are just highlights to point you in the right direction and help you prepare an excellent document that is ready for the next step of the process - scientific review! The aim of this section is to guide you in compiling your proposal document.

Click on each these grey buttons to view the information presented that will guide you through the process of preparing your proposal.

Proposal Templates

Each university has its own set of template that they use to ensure that the documents are constructed and formatted in a standardised manner. The templates have been developed by tech savvy staff to make you live easy. In some instances a faculty has its own template. Ensure that you are using the right template BEFORE you start working.



NWU Templates for Postgraduates

Watch the following training video to ensure that you can use the templates from the very beginning of your writing process.

DO NOT proceed to the next step if you have not done this step!

Proposal Cover Page

Format of the Research Proposal

- Heading
- Research proposal submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of (Degree name as presented in Yearbook) at the North-West University
- Name of the candidate, current qualification and student number
- Proposed title
- Keywords: five (5) – eight (8) keywords in alphabetical order
- (Language edited by: Name, address and telephone number. The information has to be indicated in a footnote on page).
- Please do not add the supervisor's name to the proposal (in case of blind peer review).

Proposal Abstract

What is an abstract?

The abstract provide a short summary or overview of the proposed study. It traditionally is around 150-300 words if included as abstract for the research proposal. The format can be structured or non-structured, but should include the following:

Start with a sentence or two which provide the background to the study, followed by the gap in the research/ research problem, study aim (and objectives), followed by the planned methodology of the study. The abstract should provide enough information for the reader to decide if they would like to read more or whether the study is outside their interest or scope of practice.

Literature review & writing

Overview

Academic writing is the most important part of post-graduate studies. If you research is excellent, but you are unable to share it with peers nobody will know about your work. This section provide you with excellent reading and writing resources that are available to your.

At the NWU we have the Writing Center which can provide support all the way. Grammarly is free software to check your grammar as you write and ensure a good quality product every time. EndNote is a licensed reference manager software that you should use from the very first version of your proposal. This software helps you to cite-while-you-write and ensure that you give due recognition to other authors as you go along.

Writing Center

At the NWU we have the Writing Center which can provide support all the way. Contact them as soon as possible and build a relation ship. They will be able to support you through the whole process of completing your postgrad studies.

Reading Center

Reading academic documents and textbooks can be daunting. NWU has a specialised team that will help you to read faster and with understanding. Even first language speakers will benefit from the training and support that they offer to students.

Grammarly

Grammarly is free software to check your grammar as you write and ensure a good quality product every time. This button will take you to the website.

Before submitting any draft of your work, make sure that it has been checked for grammar and technical editing. If you ensure that the document is technically of a high quality, your supervisors will be able to provide you with good input on the research and not spend their time on unnecessary editing.

Reference Manager

Various reference managers can be used for post-graduate studies, such as EndNote or Mendeley.

EndNote is a reference manager which you can use to make your life easier and 'cite while you write'. This button will take you to more information on the web.

Writing the literature review

In the literature review section you should briefly state which literature and databases will be used to compile the submission and include the search terms applied. This section provides an overview for the reader about the context of your study.

Methodology Literature reviews

Writing process guidelines

In the manual for postgraduate study precise information is provided regarding many aspects of the writing process, the use of sources, how quotations must be used in the text, etc. In the dictation "References (Verwysings)" that was also referred to earlier, and that you must acquire, the matter regarding references is discussed extensively. Make sure that you handle the references technically correct from your very first drafts. A very important aspect about which you must take note is the matter of plagiarism (point 2.3: Use of sources and the danger of plagiarism, Manual for Postgraduate Studies, p 19). It is true that everybody is not equally blessed with a flair for languages and skilled writing ability. The scientific writing style also differs vastly from the writing style of a story in the *You* magazine. A golden rule in the scientific writing style is to make your statements in simple yet scientific language so that everybody that reads your writing will know exactly what is meant. Long and cumbersome sentences may easily deteriorate into an illogical and disconnected argumentation where nobody is able to make head or tail of something. Reading tests have indicated that sentences that contain more than 25 words are usually more difficult to understand. Rather use short

and clear sentences. Guard against the use of emotional or unclear concepts – such as for example “terribly, lots, tremendously, hardly” etc. Everyone has his/her own interpretation. Stop regularly as you write and ask yourself: “What does this say?” A good point of departure is to first read through four or five dissertations or theses and to take note especially of the way in which the writer states things. You must remember that each chapter has a unique focus.

In this way it is important to first create a broad base in Chapter 1 and to then pull the argumentation tighter in order for the relevance of the problem to stand out clearly at the end of the chapter. The research questions that follow give the reader a clear picture of what will be done in the research. In this way it is then the aim of Chapter 2 to take the relevant research literature that applies to your field of study and to study and critically analyse it. When you work through previous dissertations you will see these aspects clearly. Your supervisor will also assist you in this regard. One of the biggest problems that beginners face is how to begin writing. A sensible point of departure is to first read widely on the subjects that are under discussion in your research. You may make notes but ultimately you must write your own “story” and insert the references where they are relevant. Remember that your writing must have a logical line of argument so that the examiner is able to clearly follow your scientific line of thought (that is why simple and clear language usage is necessary). Never try to “join together” pieces from different sources. It never works. What is important is that you are able to render a common summary from various corresponding sources. The examiner only has your work that he/she reads. You have read very widely and in your head you have a very good picture, but the examiner knows only what you have written. It sometimes also helps if one sets a few guidelines for oneself regarding how you are going to handle the discussion. At the least there is a starting point and an end. The discussion may stray quite considerably from this rough “roadmap” but it has the advantage that one does not stray onto turnoffs. Keep to the central theme of your work as far as possible. If something looks relevant but you have not really addressed it in your study, it is always a good idea to mention that the matter is important but for the purpose of this study it will not be looked into further. The examiners are then able to see that you are aware of the possibilities of expansion but that you are sticking to the central theme of the study.

When you have now worked through a few dissertations and you start writing, it is important that initially you do not write more than five to ten pages. Give this to the supervisor who will evaluate your writing and scientific language use and who will give feedback. When you then discuss the corrections it is essential that you pay attention to the hints regarding your writing style. Do not become despondent – it gets better every time. A general guideline for the length of the literature chapter for the M and D is approximately 25 and 40 pages respectively. Do not give textbook information. Merely refer to such sources where necessary.

Research gap, problem, aim, objectives

You may find the following activity useful to align your research problem, aim and objectives. Compile a one-pager document where you can formulate and update your research problem, aim and objectives as you go along.

Conceptualization activity

One-pager study summary			
Working title:			
Background (2 sentences)			
Problem			Question (s)
Aim			
Objective/phase	Population and sample	Method/Data collection	Data analysis (measurable)
Objective 1: To explore	Population: Sampling: Sample: incl: Excl:		
Objective 2: To	Population: Sampling: Sample: incl: Excl:		
Objective 3: To	Population: Sampling: Sample: incl: Excl:		

PDF: 1 page
research summary

DOC: 1 page
research summary

Problem Statement

Indicate the theme of your research here. In the first paragraph, you may place the problem within a broad context but thereafter your own discussion must be focused on the problem that you wish to investigate. Place the problem within the context of existing research literature and motivate why you wish to research the problem. Explain the actuality of the study thoroughly. The discussion must ultimately culminate in the research questions that should be set clearly towards the end of the paragraph. After the research questions also indicate what contribution or advantage this knowledge, emanating from the study, may make or have.

Objectives

Here the different objectives are set out clearly, completely and precisely. (No description is given.) For example: "The aim of this study is to: 1. 2. 3."

Hypotheses

Once again the different hypotheses are set out short and sweet, e.g. "This study is based on the following hypotheses".

NB: Remember the research questions, objectives and hypotheses should be in line, preferably also the same number. For one objective to contain multiple components can sometimes lead to long-winded hypothesis testing. Rather keep it as simple as possible.

Methodology

Overview

Methodology is a broad topic. The best methodology to address your research aim should be selected and this may be qualitative or quantitative in nature. It may also be that both qualitative and quantitative methodology be suitable or a systematic review may be the most suitable methodology. You should have learned about various types of research methodology in the Research Design training section.

In this section you can now decide on the most appropriate methodology for your study and attend an in-depth training on the selected method(s). Visit the Quick Links section for trainings that are available in an online format or contact your supervisor to get more information on face-to-face training events.

Empirical investigation

Study design:

Please take note of your study design. There is a difference between a qualitative study (data by interview and focus group discussions) and quantitative study (data are collected by objective measurement in the form of measurements or questionnaires). The proposal for qualitative study design will differ, in the sense that a hypothesis testing is not possible. Data collection will also be conducted differently.

In some instances a systematic review will be conducted by the student. A very detailed protocol would be needed in particular with regards to literature search and the inclusion and exclusion criteria for studies.

Describe the design of your study here, eg does it form part of a more extensive study (eg PLAY). Is there intensively involved, crosscut recording – or whatever the case may be.

Participants:

Describe your respondents (study population) clearly, eg gender, age, race, number, pathology, geographical location, etc. Include the informed consent that needs to be obtained.

Measuring instruments:

- Demographic information
- Questionnaires: Name and surname, questionnaire, validity and reliability, applicability, already used for these types of study.
- Measurements: Describe clearly what measurements will be taken. How is the reliability of the procedure and the equipment assured?
- Intervention: If an intervention is applicable, describe fully.
- Attendance: "Compliance". How is regular participation ensured?
- Informed consent: How is this handled?

- Approval from the Ethics committee:
 - Risk-benefit analyses.
 - Recruitment - How is this planned?
- Procedure:
 - What is the procedure of the study?
 - What is tested first?
 - What is the reason for the specific procedure, etc?

Statistical analyses:

- Questions to consider when planning statistical analysis:
- Which programme is to be used to analyse the data?
- Which groups/components will be compared?
- Align statistical analysis with each objective.
- Significance of differences, etc.

Rigour

Rigour in research can simply be defined as the quality and accuracy of the research.

Ethics

NWU ethics policy guidelines

The NWU ethics policy consists of a policy statement, a code of conduct for researchers at the NWU, and rules for the management of research ethics at the NWU. Since the policy has been approved by Council, it now has the same status as any other NWU policy. The latest version of the policy and rules for research ethics can be downloaded at the following link:

NWU website: [Research Ethics](#)

The structure of NWU ethics committees

The NWU has 14 research ethics committees (RECs) that function under one regulatory body, namely the Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (RERC). The structure of these committees includes the following:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • Economic and Management Sciences | • Humanities |
| • Education | • Law |
| • Engineering | • Natural and Agricultural Sciences |
| • Health Sciences | • Theology |

Senate Committee for Research Ethics (SCRE).

This committee serves as the regulatory body for the other research ethics committees across the NWU.

Follow this link to gain access to the Research Ethics & Integrity contact details

[NWU website: Research Support Contact - Research Ethics & Integrity](#)

More specific guidelines concerning ethics guidelines and application forms can be found on the following websites:

[NWU website: Research Ethics](#)

Ethics Training

TRREE Ethics Training

Create a menu for each REC from each faculty this menu should be able to provide students with the following

1. Application forms
2. Training requirements
3. Declarations to be signed and Code of Conduct
4. Contact details of the REC administrator (for any additional information)
5. RDGC application information and application form
6. Risk disruptor
7. REC Meeting dates and agenda closure dates
8. Clips of some of the training workshops we are currently doing on line
9. Ethics renewal/extension process as well as amendment process.
10. Click on the link to Education – Ethics committees:

<http://www.optentia.co.za/education.php>

Structure of the report

Here an indication is given of whether the dissertation/thesis is planned in article format or in the traditional form.

Recommended Chapter classification

Chapter 1: Introduction.

Chapter 2: Literature review – Title of the literature review. Subsequently, you give the procedure that you plan further. It may be either the traditional or the article format. The chapter must preferably have a descriptive heading.

Traditional

Chapter 3: Method and Procedure

Chapter 4: Results and discussion

Chapter 5: Summary, conclusion

Article

Article 1: Title of article, to which journal will it be submitted

Article 2: Title of article, to which journal will it be submitted

Article 3: In the case of PhD. OR summary, conclusion and further research.

Dissertations and Theses' submitted in the traditional format, would require a submission of a draft article within 6 weeks of submitting the dissertation for examination. In the case of the PhD, a manuscript together with the proof of submission should be included in the thesis submitted for examination.

It is permissible to submit the M or D in article format. This means that the mini-dissertation/ dissertation/ thesis may consist of a number of articles that have already been published or that have been submitted for publication or are in the process of being published. It is, however, stated very clearly (A.13.7.3) that a “dissertation or mini-dissertation (also thesis) must still be submitted as a unit, supplemented with superordinate problem statement, a concentrated literature analysis and integration and a synoptic closing discussion”.

The general guideline exists that a mini-dissertation (if other question papers have been written) may consist of one article, whilst two articles are expected for a Master's dissertation and three articles for a PhD thesis. In some cases the literature review may also be submitted as a review article. The supervisors will provide further information in this regard. Articles need not already be published, but at the time of the study or before final submission they must be submitted or be in the process of being submitted. In some instances supervisors may prefer to first get the feedback from external examiners before the last articles are submitted for publication. The golden rule is, however, not to procrastinate with articles, but to send them to research journals as quickly as possible.

The practice is that the student and supervisors are indicated as the authors of the articles. The student acts as first author whilst the supervisor and co-/assistant supervisors act as second, third, etc authors.

The supervisor is indicated as corresponding author on the manuscript. The reason for this is that when the student has completed the M or D study, he/she is often not near to the supervisor and that the recommendations/corrections made by the journals' reviewers often have to take place in conjunction with the supervisors. When there are only minor changes, the supervisors often prefer to make these changes themselves and to send them back. This usually hastens the process. In the case of more or major changes the supervisor may request you to amend after mutual discussion. Remember, however, that the student remains responsible for bringing about the corrections as requested. If the student does not make the corrections and return the amended article to the supervisor within six months, the supervisor may make the changes himself/herself and return the amended article to the journal with recognition of the student as second author. The A-rules stipulate that the supervisor may submit the paper if the student have not done so within 6 months of obtaining the qualification.

In the event that a student takes up a position at any other institution the student's affiliation stays with the NWU (research unit where study was conducted), due to the intellectual property that resides with the North-West University.

Bibliography

All references in the proposal are according to the NWU, Harvard style.

You can revisit the reference manager training, such as EndNote in the Quick links section.

EndNote

Addendums

Overview

Various addendums may form part of your proposal. The proposal should have the following attached (if not included in the proposal text):

- Timeline of the study,
- Budget of the study,
- Ethics certificate,
- Informed consent letter,
- Questionnaires, instruments/ tools that you will use for data collection and analysis,
- Should any permission be needed to conduct the study, a letter of permission should be included,
- Letters of intend from potential participating facilities and many more,
- Proof of language editing,
- Author guidelines of the journals for which the manuscripts are prepared have to be included in the annexures,
- If you have submitted your article, include the letter of submission/ acceptance,
- Any additional information not included in the text, may be included here, such as tools/ questionnaires.

Below are some of the addendums you may need to include.

**NWU Code of Conduct for
Researchers**

**NWU Confidentiality
Agreement**

Assignment: Time-line

Visit the **assignments** button on the left-hand menu of the eFundi module page which you are enrolled for, e.g. REAS111 and upload a copy of your study time line planning to your student page, dropbox or as an assignment (as directed by your research unit).

File name should be as follow: **Student surname, Name, student number, Type of document, Date**

example: **Louw, Tandi, 123456, Time line, 12 May 2021**

**Timeline - Target dates
planning.doc**

Proposal completeness

To ensure that your proposal is of a high standard and that all critical components are included is very important before you submit your proposal to the scientific review committee of the research entity in which the study will be hosted. Ensure that the following has been done.

- Proposal done using NWU proposal template
- EndNote used for referencing
- All references check even though reference manager was used
- Correct NWU cover page used
- Title less than 15 words
- Title language edited
- Student name, surname and number on cover page
- ORCID number on cover page
- Supervisor(s) indicated on cover page
- Date of protocol submission on cover page
- Table of contents included and updated
- List of tables included/excluded if not in text
- List of figures included/excluded if not in text
- List of appendices included/excluded if not in text
- Abstract included
- 5 Keywords listed
- Introduction and/or background (max 1.5 pages)
- Literature overview (max 3 pages)
- Problem statement/ gap in research
- Research questions (max 3)

- Aim (linked to research question)
- Objectives (max 3) (linked to research questions)
- OPTIONAL Paradigm/Theoretical framework/ Central theoretical statement
- Research design
- Methodology (setting, population, sampling, etc)
- Ethics: legal authorisation, goodwill, recruitment, ICF
- Rigour
- Timeline
- Budget
- Reference list
- Addendums
- Page numbers
- Similarity report (TurnIt-In)

Administrative processes

Expectation about a post-graduate study

Once you have been allocated to a supervisor or promoter, it is very important that you and your supervisor understand the working relationship that will be established, by means of clarifying the expectations of the student towards his/her study, but also the expectation of the supervisor/promoter with regards to the work of the student. Many students are enrolled in the M and D qualifications as part-time students, resulting in excellent communications needed and regular contact to ensure smooth and timeous completion of the post-graduate qualification.

To ensure that there is a good understanding between the student and the supervisor of the study, the questionnaire below could be completed by both the supervisor and the student. Once both parties have completed the questionnaire independently, it is important to take cognisance of the perception where there is a large discrepancy between the student and the supervisor. These differences should then be negotiated at the start of the study.



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Role perceptions rating scale
Adapted from Moses.pdf

Administrative processes

Now that you have compiled your proposal it will be going through various administrative processed to ensure research integrity. The first is that is has to serve at a scientific review committee (SRC) within the research unit you are affiliated with. Some units require a pre-

step where it first serve in a small group with content (and research) experts to ensure all considerations have been addressed. Ensure that you know the closing of agenda date for the meeting where your proposal should serve, so that it is submitted well in time.

After approval at the SRC the proposal can be prepared (some additional documentation need to be completed) to serve at the relevant ethics committee. After approval at this committee you will receive an ethics certificate and then the proposal can serve on provincial ethics committees, where after approval to conduct your research has to be obtained from institutional management or individuals who will be participating in your research.

During this time your study title also has to be registered and examiners are already appointed by the faculty.

Scientific review committee

Ethics Approval

Title Registration