

Drafting a Research Proposal

The most basic outline for any study, and for the dissertation or grant proposal in particular, consists of a minimal set of questions that can be framed as follows:

- I. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO KNOW? (Substantive Problem)
 - a) What larger issues or concerns first drew you to this problem? (originating question)
 - b) How is your way of posing the problem different from the way other have posed it? (specifying question)
- II. WHY DO YOU WANT TO KNOW IT? (Intellectual Rationale/Contribution to the field)
 - a) Why should anyone care what you find? What difference does it make, theoretically or practically?
- III. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE ANSWER IS? (Working Hypotheses)
 - a) What answers have others provided, and in what ways are their answers insufficient?
 - b) What is your tentative answer, being sure to spell out the reasoning behind your working hypotheses and the logical interconnections between them
- IV. HOW DO YOU INTEND TO FIND OUT? (Research Design)
 - a) What methods and data have others used? Why did you choose this way to look for the answer, rather than another?
 - b) How will you know if your answer is correct or not?

* Before writing the entire proposal, write out the most concise and lucid answers you can to these questions. If you can't do this, you are not yet ready to draft the detailed proposal.