

Writing a research proposal

All students wishing to apply to do a Master of Nursing (Honours), Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery are required to submit a 1-2 page (maximum 2 pages) research proposal that outlines their intended research with their application form. This proposal must be discussed with an academic member of the Faculty, or your preferred supervisor, in accordance with the application procedures for candidature in a research degree.

Developing and refining a research idea

First you will need to develop and refine a research idea. Ideally, your research idea should come from an area in which you have an interest and preferably some expertise. Once you have an idea that interests you, it is essential to do a literature search and read available published and unpublished information relevant to the topic to ensure that the study has not been done previously. In reviewing the literature you need to find out what is known about the topic and what questions still remain to be answered. Select the major or key studies which have contributed to current knowledge in the area, and note their strengths and weaknesses.

To refine your research idea into a research project, you need to discuss it with others, to defend it (why is it a good idea? Does it answer the 'so what' question), and to consider the likely outcomes of your study (who benefits?).

The following are some guidelines to help you prepare your research proposal.

Requirements of the proposal

In order to achieve its purpose, your proposal must fulfill the following general requirements:

- establish a *context* for your research and demonstrate the *need* for it
- show that your study will meet this need, and
- how it will do so, that is, the *method(s)* that potentially you will use.

More specifically, your research proposal should have the following elements:

- A title for the study (this may change as the research progresses)
- A brief introduction that introduces the nature of the problem and the significance of the research (why you think the study is important).
- A clearly articulated research question or hypothesis that is worth asking and that can be answered.
- A brief review of the relevant literature, including 3 or 4 key publications. This should be an integrated statement that explains why these studies or theories are important for your research, and where your research fits in relation to the literature (maximum half a page).

- A description of the proposed research. This includes a broad description of the research design, including method(s) of data collection (selecting a sample, sample size) and how the data is to be analysed
- A timetable for conducting and completing the study.

Further assistance

The Learning Centre provides valuable assistance in writing research proposals. The Learning Centre can be contacted on

www.usyd.edu.au/stuserv/academic_support/learning_centre/index.shtml