

Azrieli Graduate School Dissertation Proposal Outline

Introduction: 2 - 3 Pages

As its name implies, the point of this section is to provide a broad overview of the topic to be pursued. General directions and trends, some justification for investing in this research and a broad expectation of what will be the value of the findings and for whom. A quote or two from a respected source or authority might supplement these introductory notes.

That said, it is far too early to provide much detail regarding prior research, current methods or the author's qualifications to undertake such a project. The primary objective of this section is to offer just enough information and detail to inspire the reader to turn the page, read further and consider the merits of the proposal.

Review of the Literature: 15 - 25 Pages

This is generally the longest section of the proposal. Your objectives in this section are twofold. First you need to demonstrate your mastery of the subject. You do this by critically reviewing the relevant published research related to your field of study.

You may reach back to older classic findings or landmark treatments. However, the focus should be on your familiarity with the most current and forward-looking available data and trends. Aside from simply rehashing what others did and how, it is perfectly appropriate for you to offer some commentary, both positive and otherwise, for the individual or groups of sources you cite.

Your second objective is to demonstrate that the literature is somehow incomplete. After all, if everything about the topic has been resolved, why should anyone invest time or effort in researching it further. Therefore, toward the end of this section, it behooves you to raise questions or issues demonstrating contradictions and conflicts in the findings, shortcomings in the scope or setting of prior research, or lacunae in its conceptualization. All this will lead naturally to what follows next.

Hypotheses or Research Questions: 2 - 3 Pages

Though possibly the briefest section of the proposal, this is probably the most important, its "heart." Here you will lay out what you intend to pursue to fill some of the gaps identified above and to contribute to your areas of research and practice.

This may be presented in the form of a series of assertive statements or of pointed questions that test the propositions or debates emerging from the literature you reviewed. Additionally, there may be aspects of conventional wisdom you wish to question for a particular setting or population you intend to study.

Most vital here is that you provide *operational definitions* for these key terms being employed. To be clear, these are not dictionary definitions. We may know what the words mean. You need to state how they will be operationalized and measured for purposes of the study you propose. In a quantitative study you must also clearly identify the independent and dependent variables that contribute to your propositions or questions.

Methodology: 3 - 4 Pages

It is now for you to describe in careful detail what you intend to do by way of pursuing the hypotheses or research questions presented in the prior section. This means a number of things.

In quantitative work you must detail any tests or indexes being employed to identify and measure key variables in your study. Tell us a bit about them, how they have been used, and why they are appropriate for the research you propose. In qualitative work, you should describe the data collection process—what sorts of data will be collected (such as video of classes, interviews, other materials)?

Next, regardless of the methods used, provide an overview of the population you seek to study and from which you hope to draw a sample. Avoid global generalizations and oversell. Don't claim to be researching lower grade parochial school students, if your population is comprised of fifth-grade boys in a suburban yeshiva near Chicago.

Then you need to tell us how you will choose your sample. Unless you are studying the entire population described above, you must explain how many you will draw, which if any will not be included, and how/where the testing or measuring will take place. It will also be helpful to explain how you will have access to this population, be approved by the necessary authorities, and arrange proper consent from the participants.

Finally, you should describe the sorts of analyses that you will apply to the data. Will you be conducting a regression analysis on quantitative data? Will you be analyzing pre- and post-tests after a particular intervention? Will you conduct a grounded theory analysis of qualitative interviews? This will let the reader know the sort of information we can expect to learn from your dissertation.

As you conclude this section it is appropriate to consider the limitations of what you propose. That may mean emphasizing what you will **not** be doing as much as what you will do. Moreover, what limits are imposed by the sample size, by the contours of the population or by the instruments you will employ. Similarly, are there challenges to be expected by the environment or by the general circumstances within which the research will be pursued?

Conclusion: 2 - 3 Pages

As its title suggests, this section allows you to “wrap-up” all that has preceded. That may mean a brief review of what you propose, why and with whom. It also may include a bit about yourself and your qualifications to undertake such a research project.

In addition, it is proper to consider what are the likely implications for the findings you anticipate. How might they be implemented in practice? What contributions will they make to the field of study and of practice? Also, where might they lead regarding future trends, research or application.

Bibliography: as long as needed

The bibliography should be formatted in APA style.