How to Write a Research Proposal: An Orientation

Introduction

When applying for the position of junior researcher in the collaborative project “Violence Research and Development”, you are asked to submit a research proposal. The purpose of the proposal is to ensure that you have done sufficient preliminary reading/research in your area of interest, that you have thought about the issues involved and are able to provide more than a broad description of the topic which you are planning to investigate. The proposal is of course not a fixed blueprint. Findings cannot be predicted beforehand and often the research may need to be modified as you go along.

General Information

A research proposal is 2000 to 2500 words long. A proposal should have a proper layout (typeface and line spacing) as well as a table of contents and page numbers. Good legibility and conciseness of your proposal will be appreciated.

Keep in mind that your research proposal has to be written by you. Any passage from another source has to be appropriately cited. This applies even to single sentences taken from other authors. Plagiarism may result in your disqualification.

Please make sure that you always clearly mark which parts of the proposal are written by yourself or by somebody else.

Title Page

On the title page, state your personal data, such as: name, academic title, your date of birth, nationality, your work and private address including telephone and e-mail address. This should be followed by the title of the research line and your research project. Keep in mind that at this stage, the title of your research project can only be a working title. While it should be brief, it should be accurate, descriptive and comprehensive.

General Overview of Research Area and Literature

Give a short and precise overview about the current state of research that is immediately connected with your own research project. Name the most important contributions of other scientists. The proposal should contain a clear and logical discussion of the theoretical scope of the framework of ideas that will be used to back the research.

Key Research Questions and Objectives

Give a concise and clear outline of what you intend to find out in your project and what objectives you want to achieve. Your proposal needs to justify the reason for doing the research and to elaborate how the research projects fits into the research line.

Methodology

This is a very important part of your research outline and should receive a lot of attention. It may well be the longest section of your proposal. Give detailed information about how you intend to answer your research questions. Anyone who reads your proposal will want to know the sources and quality of evidence you will consult, the analytical technique you will employ, and the timetable you will follow. Depending on your research line suitable research strategies should be defined. For example you will need to describe the intended methods of data gathering, the statistical methods to be used, the type
of literature or documentary analysis to be followed and so on.

Selective Research Bibliography

List the academic works which you have mentioned in your research outline. At least some of them should be recent publications, indicating that you are aware of the current discourse in your area of research. List only publications which you have actually used for the preparation of the research outline. Never ever just copy bibliographies from other papers. In case important publications are not available in your home country, list them separately and make clear that you have had no possibility to read them.

Editing

Once you have finished the conceptual work on your proposal, go through a careful editing stage, in which you make sure your proposal does not contain any grammatical mistakes or typing errors. Check whether the title, the abstract and the content of your proposal correspond with each other. If possible, ask someone to proofread your proposal in order to make sure it conforms to academic standards.

Checklist for a Research Proposal

In most cases your research proposal will need to include the following:

- Table of Contents
- Introduction to the General Topic
- Problem Statement and Justification of the Research Project
- Objective(s) of the Study
- Literature and Research Review
- Research Method(s)

- Data Collection, Analysis and Evaluation of Data (in empiric research)
- Expected Results and Output of the Study
- Bibliography
- Appendix, e.g. Tables etc.