

FORMAT FOR RESEARCH PROJECT - THE PROPOSAL

In this first phase of your project work you will be: (1) defining your research topic and specific hypothesis (or hypotheses) and showing how your subject relates to existing theory and prior research; and (2) very specifically and concretely laying out your plan for collecting and analyzing your data. The paper constituting this phase of the research project will be due **Tuesday, March 8** (Week 7). The paper should clearly and comprehensively cover all of the areas described below, and would probably run about 20 pages. The paper should be typed, double spaced, and demonstrate college level writing skills (e.g., clear logical structure, precise wording and phrasing, careful attention to clerical details like spelling and typographical errors, etc.). Although you will work as a team, and will probably assign separate sections of the paper to different team members, the final paper needs to read as a coherent whole, not several mini-papers stapled together. That means that before submitting the Project Proposal paper the final draft should be reviewed carefully for continuity, consistent writing style, and consistent font and visual appearance (e.g., spacing margins). I would recommend a non-serif style like Arial. You should turn **printed and electronic copies** of the following: (1) Project Proposal paper; (2) Your completed Questionnaire; (3) Your completed Codebook for the questionnaire.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

- (1) **Literature Review** -- This section provides the theoretical and research foundation for your study. This foundation grounds your study in the existing research literature, and keeps it from being based exclusively on your own guesses and hunches. Although your specific research topic may be fairly limited, it should be related to some general area of sociological research. You might begin your review of the literature with an area that particularly interested you in one of the textbooks or reference sources you have used in other sociology classes (this should be a fairly recent source, i.e., within the last 5 years). This will give you an idea of both what main theories have guided this line of research, what studies have been important, and what major findings have characterized this research area (or whether there have been contradictory findings, changes over time, and so on). The bibliography of the text will show what major journals and books contain research on your general topic. You may even find articles that directly relate to your topic. Once you have a general feel for the theory and research in your topic area, you should find source material that bears more directly on the more limited aspect you plan to investigate. One approach would be to "snowball" from sources you've found in the text bibliography. That is, find those articles or books, then check their bibliographies for additional references. The CSULB library has a range of literature search resources, such as Sociological Abstracts, Psychological Abstracts, or the Social Science Index. You should also be able to use on-line or CD ROM searches of literature databases. If you don't know how to use these latter sources, check with the reference librarian. One of the best links in the CSULB library's Electronic Resources is **Academic Search Complete** (<http://www.csulb.edu/library/eref/eref.html>). The library also has recently created a module specifically designed as a starting point for undergraduate research on sociological topics (<http://csulb.libguides.com/sociology/>). For this first paper, you should briefly summarize 10 sources that apply to your research question(s) in the "Annotated Bibliography" described below.
- (2) **Defining Your Problem** -- Now that you have your source material you need to show how it relates to your particular problem, and identify the specific hypothesis (or hypotheses) you want to test with the data you will collect. Take a close look at the opening section of several articles from major sociological journals, and see how they use the existing research literature to build the foundation and underlying rationale for their own research. You should begin by summarizing and synthesizing the existing theory and research in your topic area, and discussing how and why the more limited topic you've chosen is important to investigate. Next, you should identify and discuss the independent and dependent variable(s) you plan to use in testing your hypothesis(es), and state the range of specific testable hypotheses that will be included in your study. By "testable" I mean that your independent and dependent variables can, in fact, be captured by the operational definitions you propose (i.e., they can be objectively measured), and that the data that you collect bear directly on your hypotheses. This section should give the reader a very clear and concrete idea of your research objectives.

DESCRIBING YOUR RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

In this section you should spell out the entire plan for evaluating your project: subjects, procedures, methods of collecting data, and data analysis. It is particularly important that this section should be very clear and precise.

A qualified reader should be able to use this chapter as a guide for duplicating your study. More specifically, you should address in detail each of the following issues:

- (1) **Subjects** -- This could be people, records, parts, groups, time (i.e., your "unit of analysis"). How many subjects? How will they be chosen? That is, discuss sampling method, rationale, sample size, proportion of the total population. Give a precise and complete description of the type of sample, identifying characteristics, and step-by-step procedures for selecting your sample. Will any "control or comparison group(s)" be used? If so, describe them,
- (2) **Procedures** -- What exactly will you do with your subjects to produce the data for analysis? Provide a detailed description of the process showing what will happen after they become subjects. Discuss how and why the questionnaire methodology you plan to use is most appropriate for studying your particular problem. Describe each step in the process of producing data.
- (3) **Data Collection:**
 - (a) Describe and discuss all measuring instruments you plan to use to obtain data, and provide a rationale for why you feel these would be the most useful to obtain data you need to evaluate your project. List questionnaire or interview items you will use, and discuss what useful information they will produce from your respondents. Organize your discussion of questions into the major sections of your questionnaire(s) or interview(s), and discuss what general kinds of information each overall section will produce (e.g., background/demographic info, opinions/attitudes, behaviors, etc.), and how individual questions contribute to the theme of each major section of questions.
 - (b) Identify specifically what kinds of data will be produced from your measuring instruments (e.g., numerical scores measuring specific variables), and how these data will be used to evaluate your project (e.g., what comparisons will be made, what results would be indications of success or failure, etc.).
 - (c) Describe your schedule for distributing your questionnaires or administering your interviews.
 - (d) Discuss any pretesting you did on the questionnaire or interview, etc. before administering them to your real subjects, or suggest why you don't feel pretesting was necessary (e.g., you were using commercial tests that have already been tested).
- (4) **Data Analysis** -- Tell the reader specifically what you will do with the data you collect. There are many different descriptive and inferential statistical procedures available. Each one has its own strengths, weaknesses, and assumptions that must be met in order to use it in a valid manner. The ones you select should be appropriate to your data and your hypotheses, and you should provide a rationale supporting your choices. That is, you should discuss:
 - (a) statistical comparisons that will be made (e.g., what groups, subgroups, etc.) and how these comparisons will bear on the objectives you discussed earlier, and on the overall evaluation of your project.
 - (b) kinds of descriptive statistics, tables, graphs, etc. that will be used - and why.
 - (c) inferential statistical tests or correlations you will apply to your data - and why.
 - (d) any checks you've made, or plan to make, to test the validity or reliability of your measures.
- (5) **Anticipated Problems** -- Discuss any problem areas in planning, implementing, and evaluating your project that you feel you might run into. Discuss your strategies for minimizing or eliminating these problems, so they don't affect the validity or reliability of your hard work. How will you deal with unforeseen obstacles?
- (6) **Annotated Bibliography** -- In this final section you should provide a brief summary of at least 10 academically credible articles or books that have direct relevance to your research topic. These initial reference sources should be in the APA format and meet the following qualifications:
 - (1) At least 5 of these entries should be journal articles or other sources that would clearly represent scholarly research.
 - (2) At least 3 of your entries should be from sources obtained on the internet.
 - (3) In addition to the standard APA bibliographic information (i.e., author, date, publication), the summary should give a short description of the content of the article or book (e.g., theoretical ideas, findings, contrasting points of view), and what contribution it will make to your understanding of this topic area.

Note: As I mentioned above, In addition to your physical review of journals in the library, an efficient way to search for journal sources is the CSULB site <http://www.csulb.edu/library/eref/eref.html> and other internet sources that provide full text journal articles.

--- Let's discuss any problems you're having putting the proposal together ---

The sooner you start working with the concrete details of your research project, the sooner you will know what problems you will need to address.