

Writing The Dissertation Proposal



The Big Picture



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- Your proposal describes your proposed plan of work:
- What you intend to study (scope and research questions).
- How you intend to study your topic (methodology).
- Why this topic needs to be studied (significance).
- When you will complete this work (timeline).
- (Occasionally) Where you will conduct this work.
 - The *who, what, when, where, how, and why* of your research study!

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Parts of the Proposal

- **Title**
- **Abstract**
- **Chapter 1**
 - *Introduction/Background*
 - *Purpose/Aims/Rationale/Research Questions*
- **Chapter 2**
 - *Review of Literature*
- **Chapter 3**
 - *Methodology*
 - *Significance/Implications*
 - *Overview of Chapters*
- **Reference**
 - *Bibliography & Appendices*

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- **Creating a Working Title**
 - Orient your readers to your research topic.
 - Indicate the type of study you will conduct.

- **Example:**

“An Exploratory Study of Factors Influencing Career Certainty & Indecision of High School Students in The Bahamas”

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- **Writing the Abstract**

- **Provide a brief (100-350 word) overview of the proposal.**

- *Summarize important elements* (Introduction, Statement of the Problem, Background of the Study, Research Questions or Hypotheses, and Methods and Procedures).

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- **Writing the Abstract**

- *The purpose of the study was to examine the confidence level in career decision-making of Bahamian adolescents in the high schools in Nassau, Bahamas, investigating factors that influence one's level of confidence in career decision-making, and to compare means of Bahamian sample with the high school norms group of the Career Decision Scale (CDS).*

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- **Chapter 1**

- **The Introduction**

- **Establish the general territory (real world or research).**
 - **Describe the broad foundations of your study—provide sufficient background for readers.**
 - **Indicate the general scope of your project.**
 - **Provide an overview of the sections that will appear in your proposal.**
 - **Engage the readers.**

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- **Purpose/Rationale/Research Questions**
 - Explain the goals and research objectives of the study.
 - Show the original contributions of your study.
 - Provide a more detailed account of the points summarized in the introduction.
 - Include a rationale for the study.
 - Be clear about what your study will not address.

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- Rationale

A review of the empirical literature on adolescents' career decision-making revealed that no cross-cultural study has been done using a sample from The Bahamas. In The Bahamas, the need for a reliable measure for assessing the status of students in the career decision-making process is paramount, especially as career counseling for this community is in a stage of infancy and Bahamian adolescents are increasingly choosing to pursue postsecondary education (Hanna, 1993). Approximately 19% of Bahamian high school graduates are currently attending institutions of higher learning in the USA while 33% are attending colleges locally (Ministry of Education, 1998). As career programs are increasingly being developed to address the needs of the population of students, a suitable measure for evaluating the outcome of these programs requires some attention. Moreover, it is important that Bahamian educators have a clear understanding of the current status of Bahamian adolescents in the career decision-making process in order to design, develop, and implement appropriate career counseling and development programs.

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- **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

- **Writing the literature review allows you to understand:**

- **How other scholars have written about your topic.**
- **The range of theories used to analyze materials or data**
- **How other scholars connect their specific research topics to larger issues, questions, or practices within the field.**
- **The best methodologies and research techniques for your particular topic.**

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- **Review of Literature**

- **Situates the current study within a wider disciplinary conversation.**
- **Illustrates the uniqueness, importance of and need for your particular project.**
- **Justifies methodological choices.**
- **Demonstrates familiarity with the topic and appropriate approaches to studying it.**

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- **Review of Literature**

- **An Effective Literature Review should:**

- *Flesh out the background of your study.*
 - *Critically assess important research trends or areas of interest.*
 - *Identify potential gaps in knowledge.*
 - *Establish a need for current and/or future research projects.*

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- **Review of Literature**

- **Tips on drafting a literature review include:**

- **Categorize the literature into recognizable topic clusters:**
 - *stake out the various positions that are relevant to your project,*
 - *build on conclusions that lead to your project, or*
 - *demonstrate the places where the literature is lacking.*
- **Avoid “Smith says X, Jones says Y” literature reviews.**
- **Avoid including all the studies on the subject.**
- **Avoid polemics/arguments, praise, and blame.**

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- **Review of Literature**

- **Writing Literature Reviews: Key Point**

- **You are entering a scholarly conversation already in progress. The literature review shows that you've been listening and that you have something valuable to say.**
- **After assessing the literature in your field, you should be able to answer the following questions:**
 - **Why should we study (further) this research topic/problem?**
 - **What contributions will my study make to the existing literature?**

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- Chapter 3
- **Methodology**
 - **Introduce the overall methodological approach.**
 - **Indicate how the approach fits the overall research design.**
 - **Describe the specific methods of data collection.**
 - **Explain how you intend to analyze and interpret your results (i.e. statistical analysis, theoretical framework).**
 - **If necessary, provide background and rationale for unfamiliar methodologies.**
 - **Address potential limitations.**

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- **Tips on Drafting Methodology**
 - **Break down your methodology into subsections.**
 - These sections may include selection of participants, interview process, profiles, interpretive and analytic framework, instrumentations, methods of qualitative analysis, etc.
 - This section may also require supporting literature.
 - Anticipate and pre-empt the audience's methodological concerns.
 - Acknowledge major problems.
 - Justify your approach by showing how benefits outweigh potential problems.

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- **Significance/Implications**

- **Discuss the methodological, substantive, and/or theoretical contribution.**
- **State the practical and/or theoretical importance of the problem and/or objectives of your study.**
- **Explain the usefulness or benefits of the study to both the outside world and the research community.**

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- **Significance of the Study**

- *The type of school adolescents attend may have direct influences on their career development and decision-making. Private schools currently enjoy some advantages over public schools that may directly influence adolescents' career decision-making. Martinez, Godwin, Kemerer, and Perna (1995) found that on average, parents of American private school students were better educated, had more stable homes, valued education more, gave greater attention to learning, and had higher educational and vocational goals for their children than parents of public school students. Johnson and Anderson (1992) stated that African American parents who sent their children to private schools do so for the purpose of exerting more control over their children's educational and vocational destinies to ensure successes for their children academically, economically/vocationally, socially, interpersonally, and otherwise. Because of these advantages, it is expected that students at private schools would be more prepared in making career choices than those at public schools.*

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- **Overview of Chapters**
 - **Some proposals include a sentence length description of each chapter (i.e. chapter two reviews relevant literature; chapter three discusses the methodology).**
 - **Other proposals include more in-depth reviews of body chapters that might include major hypotheses, arguments, methods, etc. for each chapter.**

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- **Reference**

- **This includes your bibliography & appendices**

- **Include a working bibliography of key texts that inform your study and methodology.**
- **Your appendices may include Experiment Diagrams, Permissions for Human Subject Testing, a copy of Test Instrument, Tables, Charts, etc.**

- **All forms of Reference must be in APA style of writing.**

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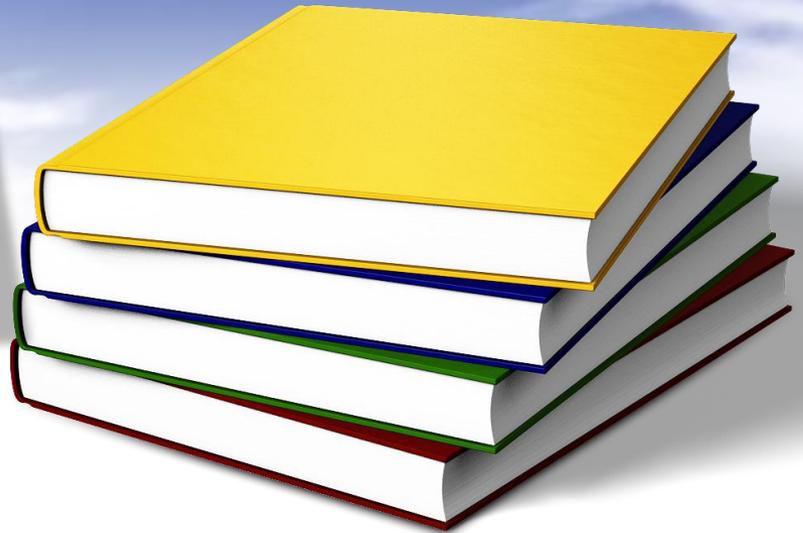


- **“Nuts and Bolts”**
 - Establish a writing schedule.
 - Begin by free-writing.
 - Keep a small notebook with you to write down relevant thoughts and questions.
 - Say parts of your writing into a recording device.
 - Compose different parts in different computer files or on different index cards.
 - Start with more “clear cut” sections first.

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- “Nuts and Bolts”
 - Understand that the proposal will be negotiated--*be prepared to revise!*
 - Think of the proposal as an introduction to your dissertation.
 - Remember that the proposal is not a binding contract.
 - Remember that your proposal is not meant to limit ideas, but to help you think practically.
 - Bring forming your committee and communicate regularly with your Chair!



REMEMBER TO PLAY!