

**School of Education Research and Postgraduate
Committee**

**REQUIREMENTS FOR THE SUBMISSION, PRESENTATION AND
DEPOSITION OF FORMAL POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH
PROPOSAL IN THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

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Section 1 - Introduction

The end of phase one of your postgraduate research program culminates in the presentation of a research proposal at a School of Education colloquium.¹ Candidates will need to successfully complete this phase before proceeding to the next phase in their research program. Students enrolled in research degrees (MEd Hons, PhD or EdD) in the School of Education are required to develop a detailed research proposal within the first six months (MEd Hons), or 12 months if a part-time candidate, and within the first 12 months (PhD), or 24 months if a part-time candidate. The EdD proposal will be developed within 6 months after initial enrolment. EdD candidates develop their proposal through the course work of the EdD program during which they also present a seminar. Candidates who cannot meet these reporting timelines will need to negotiate alternative arrangements with their supervisor and make application to the Head of the School of Education for special consideration of their circumstances.

The colloquium involves a critical discussion of the candidate's research and thesis proposal by a reading team followed by formal presentation of the proposal before an audience typically comprising academics, students, and other colleagues and professionals in education. The School expects that the proposal will be no more than between 5000-10,000 words plus a substantial list of references including: substantive research literature relevant to research topic; methodology; and where appropriate social theory frameworks relevant to education.

This is your formal research proposal and is not to be confused with the preliminary proposal, which you may have submitted with your application to undertake postgraduate studies.

Please use this document as a valuable guide to the requirements of writing, submitting and presenting your research proposal.

¹ MEd (Hons) students please refer to the FEHPS Research Guide (2001) (Appendix 1 Section 6, p. 31). EdD students please refer to the University of New England Handbook (2003) Chapter 15 (15.11.1, p. 336). PhD students please refer to the University of New England Handbook (2003) 'Interfaculty Course Rules' for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (section 7 iii, p. 519).

Section 2 - General Comments on the Preparation of a Detailed Research Proposal

A detailed research proposal should focus on one key proposition. In your research project this proposition and associated subsidiary problems, referred to sometimes as hypotheses, issues, or main ideas, are to be examined through structured arguments and/or empirical evidence which are grounded in an overall theoretical framework or body of knowledge. The propositions and associated arguments should be presented in summary form at the beginning of the detailed research proposal (the 'Introduction') in order to provide a description of the 'design' of the proposed research project. The proposal should indicate how the research project would subsequently present more detailed aspects of the arguments so that their sequence, structure and interrelationships are set out in a clear and logical fashion.

When and Where to Start

The preparation of a detailed research proposal is an interactive process in which original plans are modified and focussed, initial thoughts are superseded by second and third thoughts, and writing proceeds through various stages of drafting and redrafting. The same applies to undertaking the research project itself: you can expect to amend your original proposal, but it provides the detailed reference point for the project's development.

It is rare for the first attempt at any research proposal to survive until the final submission stages: lengthy sections may need to be broken up or trimmed back to a manageable size; new material discovered during the course of preliminary investigations may need to be added; interesting side issues may need to be deleted because of a lack of relevance to the main thesis of the paper (although these might be noted in footnotes); interaction with your supervisor/s and other 'critical friends' may suggest more fruitful ways of presenting the research proposal.

It is, therefore, difficult to specify a sequential set of rules by which a detailed research proposal ought to be written. Sometimes it is possible to write a section as each phase of the initial investigation is completed. There are a number of benefits associated with this approach: many research students find they are better able to clarify their thinking and to organise their research proposal if they begin writing at an early stage; supervisors are forewarned of difficulties likely to be experienced by students if they receive some clear signs **in writing** of 'where the student is heading' in their proposed research project; the revision and redrafting of sections of the research proposal often proceeds more rapidly if supervisors and other 'critical friends' are given small reading tasks which are well-spaced throughout the course of the six or twelve months allocated for the preparation of a detailed research proposal. The 'Introduction' is the most difficult section of the detailed proposal and is often written last.

The 'Introduction' requires a lively presentation that sets the general directions of the research project within a brief overview of the subject area. Remember every section of the thesis to be produced from your research project should link back to the specific research problems/questions presented in the Introduction. The difficulties associated with preparing this section often lead experienced supervisors to suggest that the Introduction should be written last. It is this seeming paradox that the 'middle' of the detailed research proposal should be written first, that often enhances the success of both novice and experienced writers. There is nothing more depressing for a research student than sitting

down for several days without being able to produce a satisfactory version of the first few introductory pages.

The Time Required

It is never wise to underestimate the time required to complete the writing of any research paper to its submission stage; the research proposal and thesis are no exception. Experienced supervisors usually ask the research student for a reasonable estimate of the time required and then multiply that figure by a factor of two. This 'adjustment factor' acknowledges the extra time required to complete the polishing phase of the writing. In this phase a great deal of re-writing is required as the flow and style of the detailed research proposal and the thesis itself is gradually fashioned from earlier drafts that contain the main ideas and arguments.

The Review of the Literature

In general terms the detailed research proposal normally starts with a description of 'the state of play' in the field selected for study. In other words the research student starts off the detailed research proposal by describing the point reached by previous researchers of which the research project will form a part, at this moment, in respect of the student's particular research problem/question. (Who has written about it? How has this material been received? What debates have there been? What common threads run through this material? What general themes emerge from an overview of the available literature?) This is followed by a plan of action, which demonstrates that the student understands what has been achieved in the field, and also demonstrates that the proposed research represents a worthwhile contribution to knowledge and practice in this field. Sometimes this point is left to form part of a separate 'Significance' section.

Academic Style

The initial planning of the detailed research proposal sets the stage for the remainder of the research project and dissertation writing. Within this general blueprint the student presents arguments, evidence and conclusions, according to the negotiated constraints of 'academic style'. You write your dissertation with a particular thesis in mind. That is, your dissertation develops a particular thesis or argument.

The particular style in which the detailed research proposal is written, should be established before the writing commences. The adoption of an appropriate style at the outset will almost always save a great deal of time when the research proposal and the thesis (completed research document/text as distinct containing the research argument) are being prepared for final submission. The University's other requirements regarding the presentation of the thesis should also be consulted in this regard. Conventions for layout, referencing, quotations and footnotes should be negotiated with the supervisor and will generally be in accord with the standards adopted by established scholarly journals in the field of education to which the research project proposes to contribute. Many supervisors recommend to develop a clearly set out hierarchy of headings and also to make use of 'Styles' in MS Word to assist formatting. Many supervisors also promote the use of such packages as Endnote to assist with handling the bibliography and referencing.

Focusing the Research

The School encourages students to choose research topics for their research projects, which are designed to make a contribution to knowledge and improve policy and/or practice in the area of education in which the students are actively

involved. This emphasis has been adopted because the relevance of the research topic to the student's daily responsibilities and interests has been shown to provide an important and sustaining motivation for the completion of research project in the off-campus mode of study. The selection of a research topic must be strongly focussed on a reasonable and significant issue, and must be 'doable' in terms of the student's resources. Normally the research questions will fall squarely within the researcher's personal interests.

Section 3 - Detailed Research Proposal Contents

Title Page

This page should be set out in the following order: the full title of the research proposal, the name of the candidate, a list of the candidate's qualifications (using abbreviations), the degree for which the research proposal is submitted, the name of the Faculty and the University, the date of submission for the proposal and the names of the principal and co-supervisor.

Table of Contents

A list of major sections and sub sections, and where appropriate, lists of tables, figures, illustrations, plates, symbols and abbreviations.

Abstract

200-300 word summary

Acknowledgements

An acknowledgement of personal, financial and academic assistance received, or to be received, including details of grants and scholarships should be included.

Main Text

(See Section 4: 'Outline of Main Text Sections required in a Detailed Research Proposal' below.)

References

List of references cited according to the 'style' employed by a scholarly journal in the field of educational research, usually Harvard or A.P.A.

Appendices

Only as required; may include such things as a detailed statement of ethical procedures followed in the research project, and/or a descriptive listing of materials included in the evidentiary archive. Appendices usually also contain research 'instruments' where these are relevant.

Section 4 - Outline Of Main Text Sections Required In A Detailed Research Proposal

The following structure relates to the 'main text' noted in Section 1. Although the following structure is to be considered a 'base line' model in that it can be adapted to suit the requirements of a variety of methodologies, the detailed research proposal should in some way address most, if not all, the following components:

Introduction

Provide an overview of the research proposal: its focus, contents and structure. Also indicate how this proposed research project will contribute to the goals for training educational researchers and informing practitioners.

The Research Focus/Problem/Question/Topic

Focus question: What is the problem, question, topic that is to be the focus of your research?

- a. Statement of the problem;
- b. Rationale, significance, or need for this research (in terms of theory, policy and practice);
- c. Research questions to be investigated;
- d. Limitations of the study; and
- e. Definitions of terms.

Review of the Literature

Focus question: What does the existing research literature reveal about the problem you intend to investigate?

- a. Overview of the theoretical and methodological research literature specific to the research topic, drawing on national and international sources. Explore both the research and discussion related to your topic.
- b. At this point you will need to further set boundaries to your research area. What will be included as your research area and what will be excluded or delimited? Explain and justify.

Educational research theory, methodology and design²

Focus question: Based upon your review of how have others have studied this research problem, how do you intend to investigate it, and with what justifications? Here you will need to justify your methodology in relation to what has been done before and its relevance to your research problem.

- a. Research paradigms and knowledge and your specific paradigm or approach; and
- b. Research methods and your specific research method.

² For example see: Gerber, R. (2000). 'The Role of Theory in Social and Health Research', in *Handbook for Research Methods in Health Sciences*, eds. V. Minichiello, G. Sullivan, K. Greenwood & R. Axfordm Addison-Wesley, pp. 16-33.

Analytical-Interpretive framework

Focus question: What conceptual tools do you intend to use to analyse and interpret the data you have collected? How might these concepts guide or shape your research methodology?

Explication of the analytical-interpretive concepts from an identified body of knowledge to be used in the analysis and interpretation of data. What strategies and methods will you use to gather and analyse the data?

Explain how the findings will be reported and presented.

Include your draft data gathering instruments as an appendix.

Research Ethics

Include in the proposal a discussion of research ethics. Discussion should include:

- Acknowledgement of the variety of research ethics models;
- The relevance or otherwise of the models to your investigation; and
- How the project will comply with the ethics guidelines at UNE;

With regard to the third point above, where the project involves work with human subjects (e.g. interviewing teachers or students), you will need to obtain ethics approval through the UNE Human Research Ethics Committee (UNE HREC). In preparation for submitting an application for approval to carry out your research from the UNE HREC, you will need to complete such an application and attach it to this proposal. **Do not submit an Ethics Application until your proposal for research has been accepted.**

The UNE HREC Application Form, Guidelines, and an example of an application can be found at:

http://rs-nt10.edu.au/Home/V_2_1/ethics.htm

Please ensure that the appropriate documentation required to submit a UNE HREC Application have also been attached. Basic documentation includes (where applicable):

- Information Sheets for participants (these must be submitted for all levels of participants; e.g., in schools it may be Principals, Teachers, Students and their Parents/Caregivers);
- Consent Forms for Participants; and
- Research instruments such as questionnaires, surveys and interview protocols.

Many places where you may wish to gather data have their own Ethics Committees from which you may have to gain approval for your research. Some of these include: hospitals, TAFE, Department of Education and Training, and the Catholic Schools Office. Your proposal must indicate whether such additional approvals are necessary, and that you have gathered the appropriate information and forms to complete such approvals. **You are not required to complete these applications for this proposal.**

Supervision

You will need to discuss the following supervision related issues with your supervisor and indicate in the proposal:

- How will contact be maintained between supervisors and candidate;
- How often will contact be scheduled;
- What activities will be undertaken during contact;
- Who will initiate contact;
- What reporting mechanisms will be used to record contact;
- What forms of feedback will be appropriate from both the candidate and supervisors following contact; and
- What forms of feedback will be provided.

Timeline

Proposed timeline for the project's completion of thesis including the elaboration of F and G above as well as:

- a. Introduction and literature review drafts;
- b. Trialing of research method / procedures if appropriate;
- c. Data collection;
- d. Data analysis;
- e. Report writing; and
- f. Preparation of thesis (completed document / text) for submission.

Section 5 - Formal Presentation Procedure

1. Presentations can take place at UNE or via video conference between UNE and the nearest suitable location to the candidate. For presentations on campus, candidates will need to consult with supervisors to identify a suitable date. In the case of a video conference presentation, candidates will consult with their supervisor who will make the appropriate arrangements at UNE.
2. The School of Education can fund the costs of attending and establishing a video conference; however, the funding of costs will be considered by the School on a case by case basis only.
3. Other presentation arrangements will be considered by the School on a case by case basis.
4. The proposal is to be submitted to supervisors within 10 working days prior to the presentation, and to the reading team at least five working days prior to the presentation. The candidate will be responsible for distributing a copy of the proposal to the principal supervisor who will subsequently distribute copies to the co-supervisor and the reading team.
5. A 'reading team' is comprised of the supervisors and two other persons who have a good knowledge of the methodology and a reasonable understanding of the content, or related content. The composition of the reading team will be decided by the candidate and supervisor(s) and, where necessary, Head of School, in consultation. It is not limited to staff of the School of Education but can draw upon university-wide expertise and the profession. Once the composition has been decided, the reading team will be organized by the supervisor.
6. The candidate (or the supervisor in the case of a video conference) will make a paper arising from the formal research proposal available to the potential audience on the day of the presentation. The paper will include discussion arising from the candidate's response to Sections 4 (above) including a list of references. Photocopying of the paper will be done in consultation with the supervisor.
7. The presentation will involve the candidate speaking to the paper arising from the proposal and not reading the proposal.
8. The presentation will be conducted in a collegial environment characterized by support and constructive critique. Supervisors will ensure this occurs.

Section 6 - Reporting Seminar Completion

1. Following the presentation the readers, supervisors and candidate meet to discuss feedback on the proposal.
2. The supervisor will inform the Executive Officer of the School that the student has completed the proposal and presentation successfully. The Executive Officer will arrange written confirmation of the acceptance of the proposal from the Head of School as confirmation that the research may proceed.
3. Completion of the proposal and presentation will be noted on the student's progress report by the principal supervisor.
4. If progress in the proposal or the quality of the presentation/proposal is deemed to be not satisfactory, the supervisors, and if possible the student, meet with the Head of School to discuss what action needs to be taken. In the cases of the MEd(Hons) and EdD, the relevant Course Co-ordinator should be also present.

Section 7 - Select Methodology References

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- Britzman D. 1998, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*, University of New York Press, Albany.
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- Freebody, P. 2003, *Qualitative Research in Education: Interactive and Practice*, Sage Publications, London.
- Gerber, R. 2000, 'The Role of Theory in Social and Health Research', in *Handbook for Research Methods in Health Sciences*, eds. V. Minichiello, G. Sullivan, K. Greenwood & R. Axfordam Addison-Wesley, Pearson Education Australia, Frenchs Forest, N.S.W.
- Jackson, S. 2003, *Research Methods and Statistics: A Critical Thinking Approach*, Belmont, Australia.
- Lather, P. 1991, *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy With/in the Postmodern*, Routledge, New York.
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- Keeves, J. P (Ed.), 2003, *The International Handbook on Educational Research in the Asia-Pacific Region*, Kluwer Academic, Dordrecht, London.
- McWilliam, E., Lather P., Morgan W. 1997, *Head Work, Field Work, Text Work: A Textshop in New Feminist Research*, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.
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- Wiersma, W. 1991, *Research Methods in Education: An Introduction*, (5th ed.), Allyn and Bacon, Boston.
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Education Research Journals

International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education	(P370.78/I62)
Educational Researcher	(P370.78/E243)
Australian Educational Researcher	(P370.78094/A938)

