

## DOC700 MINI-RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Following this template, develop a 10-12 page mini-research proposal that outlines a feasible, original research project within your field of study.

- **Do not deviate from this template.** ALL headings and formatting should appear in your proposal as they do in this template.
- As the proposal is a plan for research, the future verb tense will be used.
- All sections and claims should be amply supported by peer-reviewed research.

**Traditional vs. Doctoral Research Proposal Guidance** The table below offers a quick comparison to help you tailor your responses based on the type of research project you are proposing. Refer to the column that aligns with your study type as you complete each section.

Section	Traditional Dissertation	Doctoral Research Project
<b>Problem Background</b>	Emphasizes theoretical, disciplinary, or scholarly debates in the literature.	Emphasizes real-world setting, professional relevance, and practical implications.
<b>Problem Statement</b>	Identifies a gap in theory, knowledge, or scholarly understanding.	Identifies a practice-based issue or organizational problem needing inquiry.
<b>Purpose of the Study</b>	Aims to expand theory or contribute to academic literature.	Aims to inform, improve, or solve a practice-based issue in a specific setting.
<b>Research Questions</b>	Focus on explaining, exploring, or testing theory-driven concepts.	Focus on understanding or improving real-world processes, practices, or outcomes.
<b>Nature of the Study</b>	Includes standard academic methodology and research design.	Includes context-specific design often involving stakeholders or applied contexts.
<b>Significance of the Study</b>	Highlights contribution to scholarly conversations.	Highlights practical impact, stakeholder benefit, or potential for immediate application.
<b>Literature Review</b>	Theoretical and methodological emphasis; synthesizes academic debates.	Emphasis on professional reports, empirical studies, and how they apply in context.

*(Please delete this informational page before submitting the document.)*

**Title of Your Mini-Proposal**

Your Name

Westcliff University

DOC700: Doctoral Foundations

Professor

Month xx, 202x

### **Title of Your Mini-Proposal**

The introduction of your mini-proposal sets the stage for the entire project. It should clearly present the research topic, provide context by outlining its significance, and demonstrate how the study addresses a specific gap or problem in the field. The introduction should establish the importance of the research, articulate its goals, and offer a concise overview of what the reader can expect in the proposal. It lays the groundwork for the problem statement and research questions that follow.

### **Problem Background**

This section lays the groundwork for understanding the central problem the study addresses. A strong problem background situates the research within a broad academic and practical context, helping readers recognize its importance and connection to ongoing conversations in the field. It defines the broad context in which the problem exists—whether social, organizational, or theoretical—and demonstrates the relevance of the issue by showing that it is both current and significant. The discussion is supported by evidence drawn from peer-reviewed research, including statistical data, to clarify the scope of the issue by identifying who or what is affected and to what extent. Additionally, it describes how the issue has been represented or debated within the scholarly literature. This section leads directly into the problem statement in the next section. While the problem statement is precise and narrowly focused, the problem background offers a wider lens, explaining why the problem exists and why it is meaningful.

### **Problem Statement**

Based on the context of the central problem identified in the problem background section, this section indicates a clear articulation of the research being addressed. Quantitative or mixed

methods studies should begin with the statement: The specific problem being investigated is . . .

Qualitative studies should begin with the statement: The specific problem being explored is . . .

After stating your problem statement, include discussion that explains why this issue is significant, highlights its implications, and establishes the necessity for your research. Though all aspects of your proposal should be supported by research, this discussion in particular should be well-supported by peer-reviewed sources.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study section explains what the research aims to achieve and why it is being conducted. It builds on the problem statement by outlining the specific goals of the study and how it intends to address the identified problem. This section provides a clear, focused description of the study's objectives, including the scope of the research, the intended contribution to the field, and the potential implications for theory, practice, or policy. It establishes a direct connection between the problem and the research's intended outcomes.

This section begins with the statement: The purpose of this [methodology] [design] study is...

### **Research Questions**

The research question(s) guide the study by defining the specific issues or aspects the research aims to explore or answer. They stem directly from the problem statement and align with the purpose of the study, providing a focused inquiry into the topic. These questions are clear, concise, and researchable, shaping the direction of the methodology and analysis.

Well-crafted research questions help narrow the scope of the study, ensuring it remains manageable and aligned with its objectives. They are critical for maintaining the study's focus and clarity.

***Required Research Question Format:***

**Research Question [#]:** Insert your research question here, phrased as a clear, open-ended interrogative sentence.

Following each research question, incorporate information regarding how this question will lead to the achievement of the aforementioned purpose in paragraph form.

***Hypotheses (Quantitative or Mixed Methods ONLY)***

This section is included only in quantitative or mixed methods studies. Hypotheses are testable predictions that reflect the researcher's anticipated answers to the study's research questions. Each hypothesis should reflect a logical relationship between variables and serve to clarify what the researcher expects to find.

***Required Hypothesis Format:***

**H<sub>0</sub> (Null Hypothesis):** Include a null hypothesis stating there is no relationship or effect.

**H<sub>1</sub>:(Alternative Hypothesis):** State an alternative, testable prediction that offers a different possible outcome from the null hypothesis.

***Nature of the Study***

The introduction to the nature of the study section briefly explains its purpose, which is to outline the research methods and data collection strategies used to address the research questions. It provides a concise preview of the subsections, emphasizing the importance of selecting appropriate methods and data collection techniques to achieve the study's objectives.

***Research Methods***

The research methods subsection describes the overall approach to the study, specifying whether it is qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods. It outlines the type of research design chosen, such as a case study, survey, or ethnographic study, and explains how this design aligns

with the research questions. This subsection justifies the choice of methodology, demonstrating why it is the most suitable approach to investigate the problem and achieve the purpose of the study.

### **Research Design**

This section identifies the specific research design associated with the chosen method, such as phenomenology, case study, quasi-experimental, or correlational. It also provides a brief justification, supported by recent, peer-reviewed research, for the selection of the design, focusing on its relevance to the study's goals and alignment with the research questions.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection subsection details the methods and processes for gathering information to answer the research questions. It specifies the data sources, such as participants, documents, or datasets, and describes the tools and instruments that will be used, such as interview guides or survey questionnaires. This section also explains the procedures for collecting data, including sampling strategies and recruitment plans, and demonstrates how these methods align with the research design and contribute to the study's goals.

### **Scope of the Study**

Briefly describe the scope of your study, including any boundaries or limitations in population, setting, or content.

### **Significance of the Study**

This section explains the potential significance of the study within both academic and practical contexts. The significance should be communicated using objective, evidence-informed language that avoids definitive claims, as the study has not yet been conducted. The discussion may include how the research could contribute to the existing body of knowledge, address a gap

in the literature, and support the testing or extension of theoretical frameworks. If applicable, the study's practical significance should also be addressed, including potential implications for educators, leaders, policymakers, or other relevant stakeholders. This section should also clarify who may benefit from the findings and how, using cautious phrasing such as “may contribute,” “may provide insight,” or “has the potential to benefit.”

### **Literature Review**

The literature review section contains three parts (i.e. an introduction, theoretical or conceptual framework, and review of relevant literature), which, together, provide an in-depth analysis of existing research related to the study's topic. It synthesizes key findings, identifies trends, and highlights gaps in the literature that the study aims to address. This section also establishes the theoretical framework or concepts underpinning the research, showing how the proposed study is grounded in and extends current knowledge. The literature review should demonstrate the researcher's familiarity with the field, justify the research focus, and position the study within the broader academic conversation.

The opening section of the literature review sets the stage for the section by introducing the purpose, scope, and boundaries of the literature review, noting what will and will not be covered, and outlining how the section is organized. It must also explain how the literature was sourced, including databases searched (e.g., *ProQuest*, *JSTOR*, *EBSCO*), the keywords used, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria (e.g., publication date, peer-reviewed status, population, relevance). Literature selection must prioritize peer-reviewed, scholarly journal articles. When these are unavailable in emerging or specialized fields, government-issued or sponsored research reports and white papers may be used. Textbooks (e.g., Creswell and Creswell) are not permitted, as they are methodological references, not peer-reviewed studies. Dissertations,

non-peer-reviewed studies, books, conference proceedings, blogs, .com websites, and other popular or non-scholarly sources are also prohibited.

### **Theoretical *or* Conceptual Framework**

The opening section of the literature review is followed by the theoretical or conceptual framework. This section builds on the preliminary framework identified in your prospectus to provide a thorough, literature-based foundation for your study. The framework—whether theoretical or conceptual—should help explain the phenomenon under investigation, support the development of your research questions, and guide your study’s design, including your data collection and analysis approach.

You must identify the theory, model, or key concepts that form the foundation of your study. This includes:

- Stating the full name of the theory or model
- Naming the originating author(s) and the year it was introduced
- Citing relevant, peer-reviewed sources that demonstrate the framework’s credibility and application in similar research contexts

Your explanation must describe the core components of the framework and show how they align with your research problem and purpose. You should clearly discuss how the framework will inform the interpretation of your findings.

**Note:** Depending on your study’s design, you will use *either* a theoretical framework *or* a conceptual framework—not both. Therefore, it follows that your heading for this section will be Theoretical Framework *or* Conceptual Framework.

Here is a basic distinction:

<b>Theoretical Framework</b>	<b>Conceptual Framework</b>
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Draws from one or more established theories in literature	Synthesized key concepts or constructs from prior research
Often used in quantitative studies	Often used in qualitative studies
Explains why a phenomenon occurs	Clarifies what elements are central to the study and how they relate
<b>Examples:</b> Social Cognitive Theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	<b>Examples:</b> Model built from themes like engagement, identity, or persistence

- **Theoretical Framework:** Drawn from one or more established theories. Often used in **quantitative** research. Helps explain *why* a phenomenon occurs.

*Example: Bandura's social cognitive theory*

- **Conceptual Framework:** Synthesizes key concepts or constructs from prior research. Often used in **qualitative** research. Helps clarify *what* elements are central to the study and how they relate.

*Example: A model built from themes like engagement, identity, or persistence*

You must also include a brief discussion of three to four **alternative frameworks** that were considered but not selected. For each, provide:

- The name of the theory or model
- The originator and timeframe
- Key concepts and relevance to the topic
- A short explanation of why the framework was not selected (e.g., misalignment with the research questions or limited applicability to the study context)

This comparison demonstrates critical thinking and strengthens your rationale for the selected framework.

While Chapter One of your prospectus introduces your framework briefly to establish alignment with the problem, purpose, and questions, this section should demonstrate a deeper scholarly engagement. Your discussion must be grounded in **current, peer-reviewed literature**, highlight how the framework has been applied in prior studies, and acknowledge any critiques, limitations, or ongoing scholarly debates related to its use.

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

*(organized by trends, themes, theoretical perspectives, methodologies, or chronology)*

Once you have established your theoretical or conceptual framework for your study, it's time to move to the review of the literature. This is the third and core section of the literature review and should be divided into logically structured subsections using APA Level 1 and Level 2 headings. These headings must reflect the thematic, chronological, or methodological organization most appropriate to the study. **The generic heading “Review of Relevant Literature” should be removed** and replaced with analytical headings relevant to specific areas of literature being discussed to help guide the reader through the scholarly conversation.

Each subsection should focus on a key area related to the research problem, organizational strategy, or study variables and should be clearly aligned with the study's research questions and purpose. The literature should be synthesized rather than summarized, emphasizing areas of agreement, disagreement, patterns, methodological strengths or weaknesses, and relevance to the current study. The writing should demonstrate critical engagement by linking studies together to highlight broader insights and gaps.

The number and nature of these subsections will vary based on the topic and complexity of the field but should collectively support the rationale for the proposed study.

### **Gap in the Literature or Problem of Practice**

This section of the literature review highlights what is missing, inconsistent, underexplored, or outdated in the existing research or professional practice and explains how the proposed study will address that gap. While references to gaps may appear throughout the review, this section consolidates them into a clear rationale for the study.

For traditional dissertation studies, the gap may involve an unstudied population, emerging context, methodological limitation, or unresolved theoretical issue that warrants further investigation.

For applied research projects, the focus may instead be on a problem of practice, such as an ineffective process, policy, program, or intervention that requires evidence-based improvement or innovation.

In all cases, the identified gap or problem of practice must align directly with the study's problem, purpose, and research questions, and should demonstrate why the proposed research or project is both timely and necessary to advance knowledge or practice within the discipline.

### **Summary**

This final section summarizes the key themes and findings discussed in the literature review. It should restate the purpose of the review and highlight the most important conclusions drawn from the synthesis. The summary must reaffirm the existence and significance of the identified gap or problem of practice and make clear how the proposed study is positioned to address it.

This section also provides a conclusion to your mini-research proposal, so it should offer a concise synthesis of the study's key components, emphasizing the alignment among the problem, purpose, research questions, methodology, and framework. It briefly restates the central

problem the study addresses and its intended purpose, highlighting how the research design and questions are logically connected to both. The summary also reviews the major elements introduced in this proposal, including the research questions, theoretical or conceptual framework, and the nature of the study. This section is intended to provide a concise synthesis—not a repetition—of the material already presented. Students should avoid revisiting each section in detail and instead focus on offering a clear, brief, high-level recap.

## **References**

The reference list contains all sources cited in the proposal. There should be one-to-one correspondence between the citations in text and those included in the references (i.e. if it's listed in your references it needs at least one citation in-text and vice versa). The references follow APA 7th edition and start on a new page after the last line of text in the literature review.

While formatting references, ensure:

1. They are organized alphabetically.
2. They include a hanging indent of 0.5.”
3. They are double-spaced with no additional space “before or after.”
4. DOIs are used whenever available, and hyperlinked.

5. Database URLs are not included.
6. References are predominantly from the last five to ten years.
7. References are from credible sources.