

Qualitative Research Design by J. Maxwell
Chapter 7 – Research Proposals: Presenting and Justifying a Qualitative Study
OUTLINE

“Your research design will evolve as you conduct the study, and therefore a proposal for a qualitative study can’t present an exact specification of what you will do. However, this is no excuse for not developing the design of your study in as much detail as you can at this point, or for failing to clearly communicate this design; in your proposal, you simply need to explain the kinds of flexibility that your study requires.” P. 99

I. The Purpose of a Proposal

- a. “The purpose of a proposal is to explain and justify your project to an audience of non-experts on your topic.”
- b. 4 key concepts
 - i. Explain what you plan to study
 - ii. Justify your rationale for doing so
 - iii. Address your *study* - take out anything that doesn’t directly relate to or contribute your study (the proposal is not a description of how you will *write* your thesis)
 - iv. Ensure everything is clear to a non-expert

II. The Proposal as an Argument

- a. Your proposal is an argument for your study and must include the logic behind it, with coherency as key
- b. Reviewers will have these types of questions on their minds, and you must too:
 - i. What are we going to learn as a result of the proposed project that we do not already know?
 - ii. Why is it worth knowing?
 - iii. How will we know the conclusions are valid?

III. A Model for Proposal Structure

- a. Abstract: Overview or “road map” of your study that introduces the argument of your proposal.
- b. Introduction: What you want to do/study and why?
- c. Research Context: How does the proposed study fit into existing research about the topic and what does it contribute?; introduce the theoretical framework for your study.
- d. Research Questions: State your proposed questions; explain how research questions relate to the research context, your own experience and to your purposes; clarify overall focus of your questions and how they form a coherent whole (2-3 major questions is appropriate).
- e. Research Methods: Explain overall methods; justify decisions made; short description of social context. Covers the components listed in Chapter 5: research relationship, sampling, data collection, data analysis. Ethical considerations can be covered here, though if they are significant they should have their own section.
- f. Validity: Discuss validity threats and how you will deal with them; demonstrate how you will allow for the examination of competing explanations.
- g. Preliminary Results: If you have already begun your study, include this section to share what you have already learned.
- h. Implications/Conclusions: Pull together purpose of the study, what it will contribute to the field, answer any “so what?” questions that the reader may have.
- i. References: Not a bibliography for your research project but only those explicitly used in the proposal.
- j. Appendices: May include...timetable for research, letters of introduction, questionnaires or interview guides, or any completed research.

Suggested length: 20 pages or 5,000 words. (3 examples provided in the book).