

Science and Technology Studies Graduate Program
MRP Research Proposal Template
York University

This handout gives you information on what is required in the research proposal for your MRP. It is meant to be a guide; not necessarily prescriptive. Your project will in part shape the research proposal format.

- It must be written in TNR 12point font, with 2.54 cm margins, numbered pages. (bottom right corner), and single-spaced.
- It must include a title in the header along with your name (see this page as example).
- It must be two pages, single-spaced, exclusive of bibliography.
- It must include all of the following subheadings.

1. Introduction (max. one paragraph, identify the main issue or problem to be explored, and state the research problem, which is often referred to as the purpose of the study.)

2. Objective and Research Questions: One main overarching research aim with up to three research questions or objectives to be explored. Your research questions should be more specific questions that you want to ask under the larger aim.

For instance:

Through an exploration of the neuroscientific concept of brain plasticity, the wider aim of my project is to explore the entanglements between sociocultural contexts and the production of knowledge. I have three specific objectives:

1. To explore what 'kinds of people' are made up by particular renderings of plasticity and how they define the brain and body?
2. To ask how plasticity is variously enacted by situated scientific communities, asking their own research questions, located in unique social, cultural, and economic contexts?
3. To document what political debates and/or anxieties are at the core of research about the plastic brain?

3. Research Context (background): In this section you would outline the broader context for your research and its significance. Relevant background might include recent statistics, news stories, discussion of current events, or an outline of historical debates. What has drawn you to this topic and why is it of interest to your readers?

4. Literature review and conceptual or theoretical framework: The purpose of a lit review is not only to tell your reviewer the state of scholarship about your topic, but also to organize and evaluate the major points, parts, or arguments of each source.

(Consider: What sorts of questions and concepts are guiding this research on a theoretical level. You do not need something detailed here but you should be aware of the different theoretical frameworks that exist and how they shape the questions you ask. No more than one paragraph.)

5. Research Design or Methods: How will you collect the data and how will you then analyse the data? For instance, surveys, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, participant observation, epidemiological surveillance, clinical measures, discourse analysis, archival research? Explain what methods you are using in detail and why those methods were chosen for this study. Include a timeline for the stages of research and completion. In this section include other research team members, and responsibilities for research if there are two or more researchers involved.

Approximately two paragraphs.

6. Ethics: Ethical considerations in conducting the research. For instance, how will you get consent for your research, in which ways are you accounting for the specific needs of the community you are working? Each method, described above, will have unique ethical considerations – explain.

7. Significance of Research in STS (why is this research important to the agency you are working with or the communities you are working with? How does it advance knowledge? Is health being improved? Are there policy implications?)

Finally, your research proposal must include (8) a bibliography with works cited in your proposal (no less than 12 peer-reviewed, academic sources but no more than 4 pages). It must be formatted in Chicago style (in text citations).

I have a number of example proposals available for you. I suggest you read through all to get a sense of the different sorts of questions being asked, different types of methods being used, and how they are organized.

General Tips:

- Begin early. Writing research proposals is a learning process. It required writing and editing, more editing, more editing.
- Make sure your title accurately captures your research project.
- The first paragraph is the most important because it sets the tone!
- Ensure each part of your proposal responds to the required content in the instructions and to the evaluation criteria.
- Make explicit the connections between your research questions and objectives, your objectives and methods, your methods and results, and your results and dissemination plan.
- Explain terminology, ideas and concepts.
- Make sure your literature review is current.
- Make sure you use transitions between paragraphs.
- Avoid using acronyms and abbreviations. If you use them remember to write them out in long form the first time.

Characteristics of a Good Proposal:

- Well-organized
- Clear and concise language
- Grabs reader's attention
- Convinces and persuades

Common Weaknesses:

- Poor identification of the issue
- Vague and unfocused

- Dense prose
- Lots of grammatical errors
- Lack of partners or appropriate partners