

# **Final Assessment: Research Proposal Guidelines**

**Due 31/08/2025**

Qualitative Methods: Theory and Practice

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## **Overview**

Students must submit a **research proposal** (maximum 15 pages, excluding references and appendices) that demonstrates a coherent and critically reflective research design. The proposal must connect a research interest and question to philosophical assumptions (ontology, epistemology, axiology) and to methodological and methodical choices.

I suggest using the information and questions from the “28th April - Research Design” class slides on ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology and methods to guide your proposal.

## **Core Components**

1. **Title and Abstract**
  - A clear title and an abstract summarising the research focus.
2. **Introduction and Research Questions**
  - Introduction to the topic: academic and/or real-world significance
  - One main research question and optional sub-questions
3. **Background and Literature Review**
  - Overview of key theories, debates and empirical studies
  - Clear identification of a gap or problem that your study addresses
  - How your research will contribute to the field
4. **Ontology and Epistemology**
  - Ontological assumptions: nature of reality in your study
  - Epistemological assumptions: how knowledge about your topic can be generated
  - Explain the relationship between your worldview and your research aims
5. **Axiology**
  - Reflection on values, biases, researcher positionality and the role (if any) of reflexivity
  - Any ethical considerations emerging from your topic, philosophy, methodology etc.
  - Where necessary, a relevant and direct link between your positionality and your research choices/process
6. **Methodology**
  - The overarching research strategy
  - Why this approach is suited to your ontological and epistemological position
7. **Methods and Data Sources**
  - Data collection techniques and rationale
  - Case selection, sampling strategy
  - Data management, storage and ethical procedures (can be combined with axiology)
  - Outline of data analysis procedures and rationale
8. **Evaluation, Limitations and Challenges**
  - Potential methodological, ethical or practical limitations
  - Strategies to address or mitigate these challenges
  - Standards and criteria that will ensure rigour as appropriate to your research philosophy and design
9. **References**
  - Full references using a consistent citation style (e.g. Harvard, APA, Chicago)
10. **Appendices (optional and not counted in the page limit)**
  - Instruments (e.g. interview guides, sample consent forms, coding frameworks)

## Grading Criteria

Criterion	Weighting
Research Design Clarity (research questions, methods, feasibility, logical structure)	20%
Engagement with Literature (depth, relevance, critical engagement)	20%
Conceptual Coherence (alignment between philosophy, theory, design, methods)	20%
Critical Reflection (reflexivity, positionality, awareness of limitations, research ethics)	20%
Writing Quality, Organisation and Referencing	20%

### 1. Research Design Clarity (20%)

#### What it assesses:

- How clearly and logically the research questions are formulated.
- Whether the proposed methods are appropriate for answering the research questions.
- Feasibility of the project: are the data sources, scope, and timeline realistic?

#### Indicators of strong performance:

- Research questions are precise, focused and relevant to the problem identified.
- Methods appropriately reflect ontological and epistemological assumptions.
- Anticipated challenges are addressed realistically.

### 2. Engagement with Literature (20%)

#### What it assesses:

- Depth and breadth of reading relevant to the topic and methodology.
- Ability to critically engage with and apply theories, concepts and empirical studies (not just summarising).
- Use of literature to justify choices throughout the proposal.

#### Indicators of strong performance:

- Shows understanding of key debates in the field.
- Critical comparisons between sources, not just descriptions.
- Integrates literature into the argumentation logically.

### 3. Conceptual Coherence (20%)

#### What it assesses:

- Consistency and logical connection between ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods.
- Whether the philosophical foundations underpin the research design properly.

#### Indicators of strong performance:

- Philosophical assumptions are made explicit and defended.
- Methodological and method choices logically follow from these assumptions.
- There is a clear “red line” running from research question, philosophy to design choices and possible challenges with no internal contradictions between different parts of the proposal.

### 4. Critical Reflection (20%)

#### What it assesses:

- Awareness and discussion of the researcher's own values, assumptions and positionality *where they are clearly **relevant** to research design choices.*
- Acknowledgement of the ethical and practical limitations of the research.
- Thoughtful consideration of how biases and context might shape findings, and of how participants can be ethically integrated (e.g. informed consent, anonymity, etc.).

**Indicators of strong performance:**

- Honest and thoughtful engagement with potential biases.
- Ethical considerations integrated into the research design, not added superficially.
- Recognition of challenges and uncertainties in the knowledge-production process.
- A realistic reflection on the potential (negative) effects on participants and how to mitigate.

**5. Writing Quality, Organisation, and Referencing (20%)**

**What it assesses:**

- Clarity, readability, specific and direct wording (no AI vagueness) and logical flow of writing.
- Proper structure (clear sections, coherent argument development).
- Correct and consistent referencing style throughout.

**Indicators of strong performance:**

- Clear and well-organised structure with good signposting.
- Formal academic writing, few language errors, no AI generated text identifiable.
- All sources cited properly and consistently.