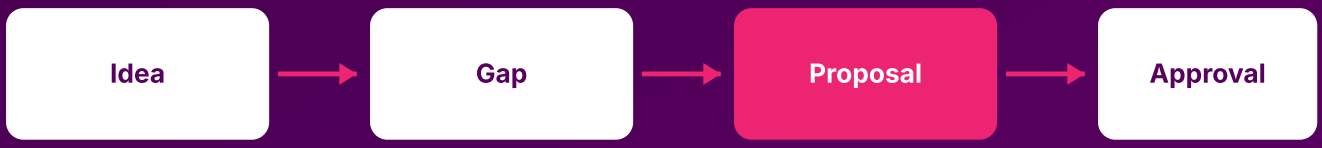
QUICK ASSIGNMENT HELP · FREE ACADEMIC GUIDE

Research Proposal Sample and Format

A practical guide for BS, MS, MPhil and PhD students in Pakistan, with a complete illustrative sample, diagrams and checklists.



quickassignmenthelp.com.pk

Format rules differ by university and department. Always follow your own university's template and your supervisor's instructions.

START HERE

How to use this guide

This guide explains what a research proposal contains, why each section exists, and how the parts connect. A full sample proposal is included so you can see the logic in practice.

If you are...	Read first
Choosing a topic	Pages 3, 6, 7
Writing the literature review	Pages 8, 9
Choosing methods	Pages 10 to 12
Preparing to submit	Pages 17 to 20
Want a worked example	Pages 15 and 16

Important disclaimer. There is no single proposal format for all Pakistani universities. Universities, faculties and departments set their own templates, page limits, fonts and referencing styles. This guide teaches the common logic of a proposal. It does not replace your university's guidelines or your supervisor's approval.

Academic integrity. The sample on pages 15 and 16 is illustrative. Do not copy it into your own submission. Use it to understand structure, then write your own proposal on your own topic from your own reading.

How to use the sample responsibly

- Compare the logic of each section with your own topic.
- Replace every example with your own research problem, literature and methods.
- Show your draft to your supervisor early.

BASICS

What is a research proposal?

A research proposal is a short plan that explains what you want to study, why it matters, and how you will study it. Its job is to convince your supervisor and committee that the study is worthwhile, original enough and feasible within your time and resources.

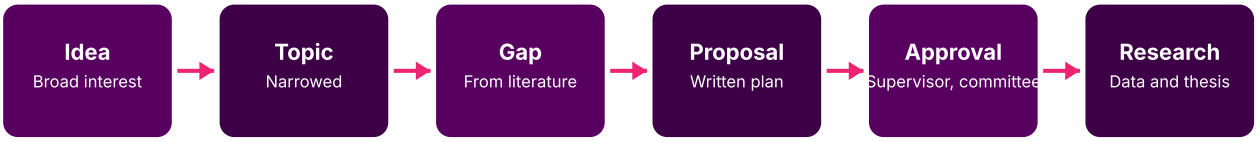


Figure 1. From idea to approved research

Document	Purpose	Usual stage
Proposal	Plan and justify a study	Before research starts
Research paper	Report a completed (often smaller) study	After research
Thesis	Report of a larger study, usually MS or MPhil	End of degree
Dissertation	Extended report, term often used for PhD or taught masters	End of degree

> Terms such as thesis and dissertation are used differently across institutions. Check which term your university uses.

STRUCTURE

Typical structure of a research proposal

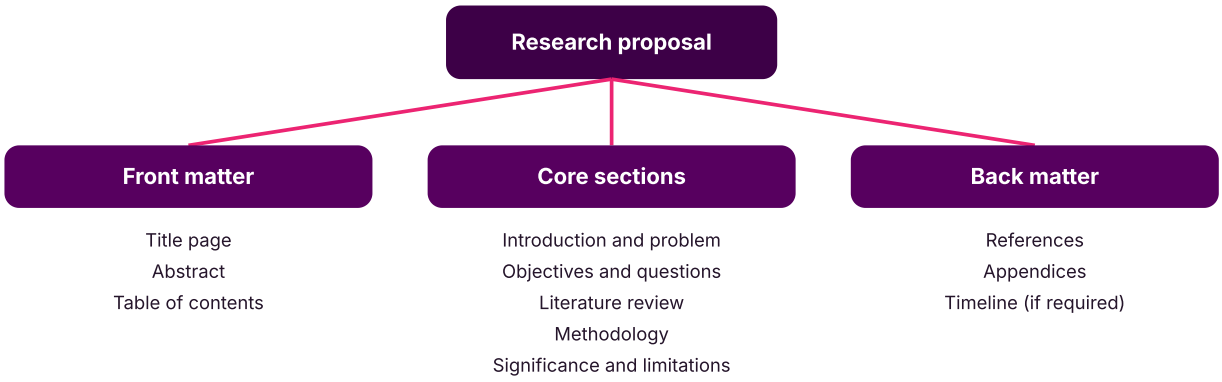


Figure 2. Common proposal structure (illustrative)

Group	Section	Notes
Commonly included	Title, abstract, introduction, problem statement, objectives, research questions, literature review, methodology, references	Almost every template has these in some form
Required where relevant	Hypotheses, theoretical or conceptual framework, ethics statement, timeline, budget	Depends on design and level
University-dependent	Supervisor certificate, self-assessment, plagiarism report, chapter outline, page limits	Follow your own template

> Order and headings differ. Some templates put the framework inside the literature review; some require a research schedule, others do not.

FRONT SECTIONS

Title page, abstract and introduction

Title

- Name the topic, population and, where useful, the setting.
- Avoid vague words such as “a study of”.
- Keep it specific enough to be answerable.

Abstract

- A short summary: problem, aim, method, expected contribution.
- Write it last, even though it appears first.
- Do not report findings you do not yet have.

Introduction

- Background and context.
- Why the topic matters now.
- A clear move toward the problem statement.
- Some templates cap the introduction, for example at two pages.

Illustrative title page layout

UNIVERSITY NAME

Department of ...

PROPOSED TITLE OF THE STUDY

Submitted by: Name, Roll No.

Supervisor: Name

Degree: MS / MPhil / PhD · Session

Month, Year

> This layout is only an example. Universities usually supply their own title page.

CORE LOGIC

Problem statement and research gap

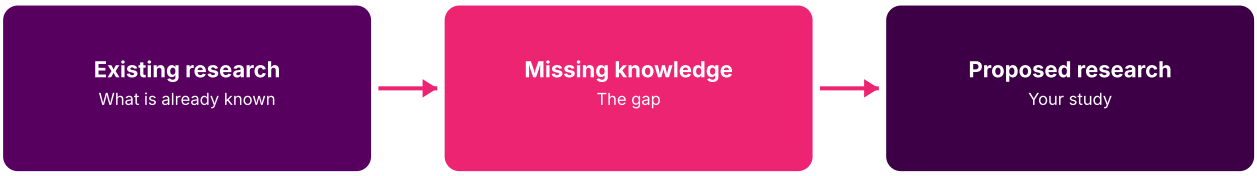


Figure 3. Finding the gap that justifies your study

Weaker statement	Stronger statement (illustrative)
Social media is harmful for students.	Existing studies on social media use and academic outcomes report mixed results, and little is known about how these patterns look among undergraduates in Pakistani universities.
There is a lot of problem in education.	Students are told to use evidence-based study habits, yet it is unclear which habits are actually used in public sector colleges.

A good problem statement

- Names a specific issue or knowledge gap.
- Is supported by existing literature, not opinion.
- Leads directly to your objectives and questions.
- Is narrow enough to study with your time and resources.

> A gap is not “nobody has studied this”. It is a specific, justified limitation in what is known, such as context, population, method or time.

AIMS

Objectives, research questions and hypotheses



Figure 4. Each objective maps to a question and a method (illustrative)

Element	What it does	Tip
Objective	States what you aim to achieve	Begin with a verb: to examine, to assess, to explore
Research question	The question your data will answer	One clear question per objective
Hypothesis	A testable prediction, mainly in quantitative work	Not compulsory in every study; qualitative designs usually do not use them

> Keep the number small. Three to five objectives are common, but follow your department's expectations.

EVIDENCE

Literature review



Figure 5. Five steps of a literature review

A literature review is not a list of summaries. It groups sources by theme, compares what they found, and shows what remains unanswered.

Simple literature matrix

Source	Context	Method	Main idea	Limitation / gap
Author, year	Country, population	Design, sample	Key finding	What is missing
Author, year	...	...	...	...
Author, year	...	...	...	...

- Use recent, peer-reviewed sources where possible, plus classic works for theory.
- Organise by theme, not by author.
- Always end with the gap that leads to your study.

FRAMEWORKS

Theoretical and conceptual framework

Theoretical framework	Conceptual framework
Established theory that explains why variables should relate	Your own diagram of the variables and the relationships you will study
Taken from existing literature	Built from literature and your research questions



Figure 6. Illustrative conceptual framework. Relationships are proposed, not validated causal claims

> Arrows in a proposal show relationships you intend to test. They do not prove cause and effect.

- Define every variable in the diagram.
- Link each variable to a literature source.
- Match the framework to your hypotheses or questions.

METHOD

Research design and methodology



Figure 7. Choosing a design starts from the research question

	Quantitative	Qualitative	Mixed methods
Data	Numbers	Words, observations	Both
Typical tools	Questionnaire, tests	Interviews, focus groups	Combination
Analysis	Statistics	Thematic or content analysis	Both
Strength	Generalisation	Depth	Fuller picture
Challenge	Less depth	Smaller samples	Time and skills

> Justify your choice. Explain why this design fits your question, not simply that it is common.

DATA

Population, sampling and data collection

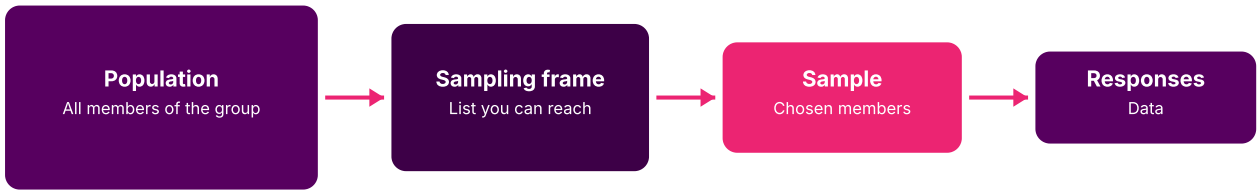


Figure 8. From population to data

Approach	Examples	Note
Probability sampling	Simple random, stratified, cluster	Allows stronger generalisation
Non-probability sampling	Convenience, purposive, snowball	Common but limits generalisation; state this honestly

> There is no universal sample size. Justify yours using your design, population, analysis method, available guidance and your supervisor's advice.

Data collection checklist

- Define the population and who is excluded.
- Name the instrument and its source.
- Pilot test and revise unclear items.
- Explain how and when data will be collected.

ANALYSIS AND ETHICS

Data analysis plan and ethics

Aim	Possible technique (examples)
Describe	Frequencies, means, standard deviation
Relate	Correlation, regression
Compare	t-test, ANOVA
Reliability	Cronbach's alpha (see Tavakol and Dennick, 2011)
Themes	Thematic analysis (see Braun and Clarke, 2006)



Figure 9. Core ethics points to address

- Explain how consent will be obtained.
- Explain how identities and data will be protected.
- State whether ethics committee or department approval is required.
- Plan for participants who wish to withdraw.

> Choose techniques that match your question and data. Name software only if you will actually use it.

CLOSING SECTIONS

Significance, scope, limitations and expected outcomes

Section	Explains	Do not
Significance	Who benefits and how	Overclaim
Scope / delimitations	What you include and exclude, and why	Hide boundaries
Limitations	Weaknesses you cannot avoid	Ignore sampling and self-report issues
Expected outcomes	What the study aims to contribute	Present them as findings

Expected is not found. A proposal can say what you aim to learn. It must not state results before data are collected.

Example wording

- “The study aims to contribute evidence on ...”
- “Results will be limited to students in the sampled institutions.”
- “Self-reported data may be affected by recall and social desirability.”

PLANNING

Research timeline

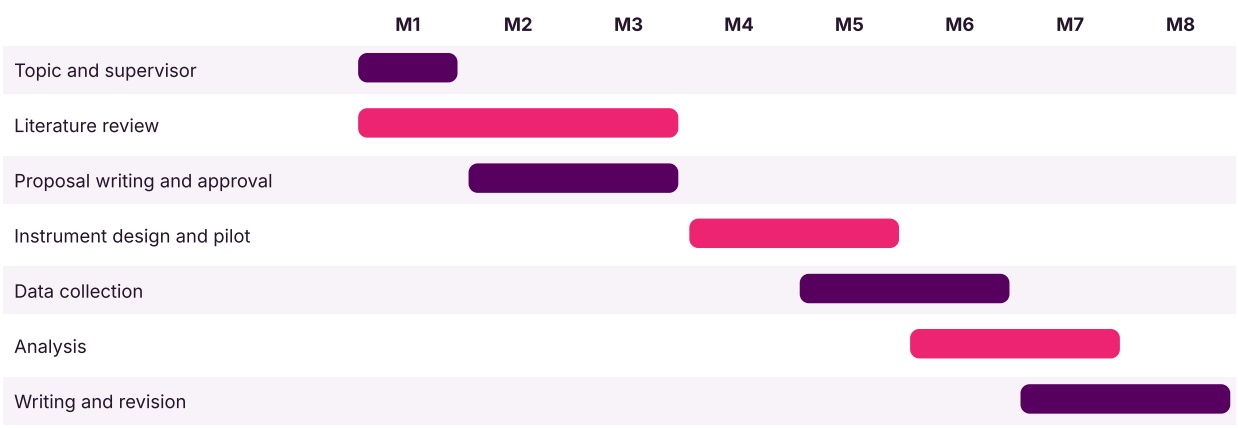


Figure 10. Illustrative Gantt chart. Durations are examples only

> Real timelines depend on your degree, approvals, data access and university calendar. Some templates require a schedule; others do not.

- Leave time for supervisor feedback and revision.
- Allow extra time for ethics approval and data collection delays.
- Do not copy these durations without checking your own programme rules.

ILLUSTRATIVE SAMPLE (1 OF 2)

Impact of Social Media Usage on Academic Performance Among University Students in Pakistan

Illustrative example only. Plan details such as population, sample and instruments are proposed for teaching purposes. No data were collected and no findings are reported. Do not copy.

Abstract

This proposed study aims to examine the relationship between social media usage and academic performance among undergraduate students in Pakistani universities. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design is proposed. The study expects to contribute context-specific evidence for students, teachers and university counsellors.

1. Introduction

Social networking sites are widely used by students (boyd and Ellison, 2007). Researchers have asked whether time spent on them is related to academic outcomes, with studies reporting different patterns (Kirschner and Karpinski, 2010; Junco, 2012).

2. Problem statement

Earlier studies report mixed associations between social media use and academic performance, and much of this evidence comes from other countries. Little is known about how these relationships look among university students in Pakistan, where access, language and study conditions differ.

3. Objectives

- To describe patterns of social media use among the target students.
- To examine the relationship between social media use and self-reported academic performance.
- To compare patterns across selected groups, such as gender or study level.

4. Research questions

- RQ1: How do students use social media for study and non-study purposes?
- RQ2: Is social media use related to academic performance?
- RQ3: Do patterns differ across groups?

5. Hypotheses (optional)

H1: Social media usage is associated with academic performance.

ILLUSTRATIVE SAMPLE (2 OF 2)

Literature, method and plan

6. Literature review (outline)

- Social networking sites and student life (boyd and Ellison, 2007).
- Time on social media and academic outcomes (Kirschner and Karpinski, 2010; Junco, 2012).
- Problematic use and wellbeing (Kuss and Griffiths, 2017).
- Gap: limited context-specific evidence for Pakistani undergraduates.

7. Methodology (proposed)

Element	Proposed approach
Design	Quantitative, cross-sectional survey
Population	Undergraduate students of selected universities in Pakistan
Sampling	Method and size to be justified with the supervisor; limitations of non-probability sampling to be stated if used
Instrument	Structured questionnaire adapted from existing validated scales; pilot test before use
Reliability	Cronbach's alpha on pilot and main data (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011)
Analysis	Descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, group comparisons
Ethics	Informed consent, anonymity, voluntary participation, secure storage, approval where required

8. Significance, limitations and expected outcomes

- Significance: evidence for teachers, counsellors and students.
- Limitations: self-reported data, sampled institutions only, cross-sectional design.
- Expected outcomes: the study aims to describe patterns and test the proposed relationship. It does not presuppose a result.

9. Timeline

See Figure 10 for an illustrative schedule.

References (all sources verified through Crossref)

boyd, d. m., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13*(1), 210–230. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x

Junco, R. (2012). Too much face and not enough books. *Computers in Human Behavior, 28*(1), 187–198. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2011.08.026

Kirschner, P. A., & Karpinski, A. C. (2010). Facebook and academic performance. *Computers in Human Behavior, 26*(6), 1237–1245. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2010.03.024

Kuss, D. J., & Griffiths, M. D. (2017). Social networking sites and addiction: Ten lessons learned. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 14*(3), 311. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph14030311

Tavakol, M., & Dennick, R. (2011). Making sense of Cronbach's alpha. *International Journal of Medical Education, 2*, 53–55. https://doi.org/10.5116/ijme.4dfb.8dfd

LEVELS

BS, MS, MPhil and PhD: how expectations differ

Level	Typical emphasis	Common expectation
BS	Applying existing knowledge to a defined problem	Clear topic, basic review, simple design
MS	Independent small study	Solid review, justified method, careful analysis
MPhil	Research-focused masters level	Stronger methodology and argument
PhD	Original contribution to knowledge	Clear gap, theory, rigorous design, publishable work

> These are general patterns, not rules. Credit hours, thesis requirements and approval stages differ by university and programme.

Official policy note

HEC Pakistan's Graduate Education Policy 2023 (GEP-2023) applies from Fall 2023 and covers graduate programmes, including dissertation-related guidance. Check the policy and your university's own rules for your degree.

HEC Graduate Education Policy page

FORMATTING

University formatting guidelines

Formatting is set by your university or department. Examples seen in published templates include Times New Roman at 12 pt, double spacing and A4 paper. Others use different sizes and limits.

Item	What to check in your guidelines
Font and size	Required font and size for title, headings and body
Spacing and margins	Line spacing and margins
Page or word limit	Proposal length and whether references count
Referencing style	APA 7th edition is one common example; others are used
Front pages	Title page, certificate, declaration
Submission	Hard copy, soft copy, plagiarism report

> There is no universal font, margin or word count for all Pakistani universities. Do not format from a template of another university.

APA style resources: apastyle.apa.org

AVOID

Common proposal mistakes

Mistake	Why it matters	Fix
Topic too broad	Cannot be completed or tested	Narrow population, variables, setting
No clear gap	Study seems unnecessary	Show the limitation in existing work
Objectives do not match methods	Data cannot answer questions	Map objective, question and method
Literature listed, not synthesised	Weak argument	Group by theme and compare
Unjustified sample	Weak credibility	Explain and state limitations
Expected results written as findings	Misleading	Use “aims to” language
Copied text	Plagiarism risk	Paraphrase, cite, and check similarity
Ignoring university template	Rejection or delay	Use the official format

SUBMIT

Submission checklist

- [ ] Title is specific
- [ ] Problem statement shows a gap
- [ ] Objectives, questions and methods align
- [ ] Literature is synthesised and recent
- [ ] Framework or variables defined
- [ ] Design justified
- [ ] Population and sampling explained
- [ ] Instrument and reliability described
- [ ] Analysis plan stated
- [ ] Ethics addressed
- [ ] Limitations stated
- [ ] Timeline included if required
- [ ] References complete and consistent
- [ ] Similarity and AI-text check done
- [ ] Supervisor approved the draft
- [ ] University format followed

Figure 11. Tick each box before you submit

> Passing a checklist does not guarantee approval. Your supervisor and committee decide.

EXAMPLES

Examples of institutional proposal formats

Published proposal formats show how much institutions differ. These examples are for understanding only, not as formats to copy.

Source	What it is	Features seen
Qurtuba University, Management Sciences	Institution-specific MS and PhD format	Supervisor certificate and self-assessment; short introduction; Times New Roman 12, double spaced, A4; APA
HEC Postdoctoral Fellowships Programme	Funding application for postdoctoral fellows, not a student template	Executive summary, impact, project description with page limits, management, resources
Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University (SBBU)	University-specific MS and MPhil format	Guidelines with heading sizes, sample template with research schedule, APA

> The HEC postdoctoral format is for fellowships and is not the universal student proposal format in Pakistan. Each university must be followed on its own terms.

Formats can change. Always download the current template from your own university or department.

USING TEMPLATES WELL

How to get more from your university template

Template usually gives	You still need to add
Headings and order	Logic that connects problem, objectives, questions and methods
Page limits	Judgement about what to include in limited space
Formatting rules	Clear writing and consistent referencing
Checklists	Supervisor feedback and honest self-review

Practical approach

- Start with your university template.
- Use this guide to understand the purpose of each section.
- Draft the problem, objectives and questions first.
- Check alignment before writing details.
- Get supervisor feedback on a short outline before the full draft.

> This guide is educational. It does not guarantee approval of any proposal.

RESOURCES

Official resources and references

Official resources

- HEC Graduate Education Policy (GEP-2023) page
- GEP-2023 policy document (PDF)
- APA Style

Further reading

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Tavakol, M., & Dennick, R. (2011). Making sense of Cronbach's alpha. *International Journal of Medical Education, 2*, 53–55. https://doi.org/10.5116/ijme.4dfb.8dfd

> Journal articles above were checked against Crossref records. The book is a standard textbook cited without a DOI.

FINAL REMINDER

Follow your university. Understand your own proposal.

A strong proposal is clear, honest about its limits and approved by your supervisor. Use this guide to learn the logic, then build your own.

Need academic guidance on structure, methodology or editing? Visit quickassignmenthelp.com.pk