

BOX 8.1 Reviewing a research proposal—checklist

If you are writing a research proposal which is part of your Master's or PhD programme of study and not for submission to a funding organization, then omit the parts that are not relevant to you such as letters from collaborators and CVs.

Title and abstract

- Does the title conform to the length stipulated by the instructions supplied?
- Is the title descriptive of the content of the proposal?
- Does the abstract conform to the length limit stipulated in the instructions supplied?
- Does the abstract outline your research question, methods, and significance of the study arranged in a logical order?
- Are there any unnecessary words or sentences in the title or abstract that can be removed to improve conciseness and clarity?

Background and significance of the proposal

- Do you have a clear hypothesis or research question?
- Does your background set out the most relevant information so that the reader can place your work in context?
- Does your background show clearly which gap in knowledge you are addressing?
- Does your background show clearly why it is important to study the research question and why it should be studied now?
- Is your research question aligned to the funding priorities of the funding organization?

Objectives of the proposed study

- Do you have clear objectives that address the research question or hypothesis?
- Can each objective be tested experimentally and does it have a measurable outcome?

Experimental strategy

- Have you selected the most appropriate methods for testing your research questions?
- Does your description of methods contain sufficient details for the reviewer to judge that your proposed strategy is robust?
- Have you described how you will analyse your data?
- Have you described what outcome you expect for each experiment?
- Is there a clear relationship between the aims of the project, the methods, and your proposed outcomes?
- Can your objectives be realistically achieved within the time scale you have

outlined?

- Have you identified any potential problems and provided suggestions for overcoming the problems?

Ethical considerations

- Is your proposed work ethical?
- Have you obtained ethical approval and licences (or included details of arrangements in place to obtain approval and licences) where necessary?

Budget and justification of resources

- Is your projected budget accurate?
- Have you justified the resources you have requested adequately?
- Can you realistically complete the work with the resources requested?
- Does the budget match the amount of funds the organization will pay?

Details of staff and environment

- Have you included details of your research experience that show that you are competent to complete the project successfully?
- Have you included details about your research environment and the skills of the key workers who will contribute to the project to show that the likelihood of completing the project successfully is high?
- If you and your institution do not have a particular material or expertise, have you provided supporting letters from collaborators who will supply the material or expertise?

Dissemination and data sharing

- Have you included a statement which describes how you will disseminate your findings to the academic community and other interested parties outside the academic community?
- Have you included a statement that describes how you will share the data generated through your research with the scientific community?

References

- Are your references relevant to the proposed work and are they up to date?
- Are all the sources you have used appropriately acknowledged in the text?
- Are all the sources cited in the text also listed at the end in the reference list?
- Have you used a consistent style of referencing both in the text and in compiling the reference list?
- Does the format of referencing used conform to any guidelines provided?

Organization and coherence of your proposal

- Have you used appropriate sub-headings to section the proposal?
- Does each paragraph cover one topic only?

- Do the paragraphs follow in a logical manner so that the line of reasoning is clear?
- Are appropriate transitions used to link each successive paragraph?
- Are there any unclear or long sentences that can be rewritten to improve clarity?
- Are there any places where you have repeated what you have said elsewhere and therefore where content needs deleting?
- If you have used illustrations, are they cited in the text?
- Is each illustration numbered sequentially?
- Does each illustration include a title, legend, and a number?
- If you have used any abbreviations, symbols, or units, are they in the correct format and consistent in style?
- Have you defined abbreviations at first use?
- Have you checked for mistakes in spelling, grammar, and punctuation?
- Have you checked the layout of the document (e.g. font size and style, spacing, margin size) and the length to see that it conforms to the guidelines provided?