

GUIDELINES FOR PREPARING A PROSPECTUS FOR A PROJECT OR DISSERTATION

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Disciplined inquiry and development in education are rational, goal-directed endeavors. Successful research, development, measurement, or evaluation projects are not accidents or haphazard occurrences. They result from careful planning and forethought. Projects that are not carefully planned in advance generally produce inconclusive results. Such projects are not only futile, but expensive in terms of wasted efforts, time and money.

A prospectus is a blueprint: a set of written, detailed plans and specifications for conducting a project. The act of preparing and writing a prospectus is a planning process. It requires you to --

1. Clarify the purposes and focus of your work.
2. Anticipate the major difficulties or problems likely to be encountered.
3. Decide which tool and procedures are likely to be most productive in achieving the purposes of the project and resolving the problems likely to occur.
4. Decide which tasks need to be done in what order and by whom.
5. Estimate the various costs involved and decide how the project will be financed.

Like the act of preparing a blueprint, writing a prospectus requires creative thinking. It requires skill in anticipating, conceptualizing, and solving problems. However, creative thinking should not be confused with vague or unclear thinking. Unclear writing usually results from unclear thinking. The solution is more thorough analysis and more precise thinking and rethinking, and more precise diction.

Writing -- in the sense of composing and authoring -- is a process of thinking and rethinking. Meaningful patterns of words, sentences, and paragraphs do not exist until they are constructed by a human mind. However, the process of writing involves more than just generating ideas. Good writers clarify and refine their thinking as they write. They carefully examine the direction of their thinking and the line of reasoning they have used. They test the meaning of their written expressions against the meaning and intent in their mind. Sometimes they modify what they have written in order to better comply with what they had in mind. But, sometimes examination of what they have written leads them to modify what they had in mind. Hence, the act of writing is a process of shaping and clarifying ideas. Writing a prospectus is a process of clarifying the problem you wish to address and shaping and refining your plans for solving this problem.

In planning your project you should work closely with your chair or with a faculty member who has consented to serve as a sponsor for your project. In choosing a sponsor, try to select someone who is knowledgeable in the specialty area and who has an interest in the problem you

are working on. For a dissertation you should also work closely with all members of your advisory committee. A useful way to begin is to write a two or three page preliminary proposal. In this initial document you should --

1. Define the problem you plan to attack as clearly as you can.
2. Explain why there is a need for a project in this area.
3. Describe the general approach you would use to conduct the project.

Share this preliminary paper with your sponsor, chair, and other committee members. Ask them whether the idea has potential for a successful project. If the basic idea has some promise, ask them to help you refine and improve it. This may involve a reformulation of the problem or suggestions of more productive ways to attack it. You may also wish to seek feedback from fellow students. Suggestions received in the initial stages are easier to incorporate and are considerably more helpful than those offered when your prospectus is nearly complete.

Expect to spend considerable time in refining your prospectus. Time and care expended in analyzing the problem and planning appropriate procedures will reduce the likelihood of difficulty and disappointment in conducting your project and will enable you to write the final report with fewer problems.

Your prospectus must be approved and SIGNED by appropriate members of the faculty. All approvals and signatures should be obtained BEFORE you begin a project. A signed prospectus becomes a protection to you, because it assures you that when your completed project is evaluated by faculty members they cannot fault you for conducting the study according to the approved plan.

If your project involves work in the public schools, you should discuss your work with, and receive preliminary approval from, appropriate administrators in the college and school district in which you expect to work, but you must have an approved, signed prospectus before obtaining final permission. Your prospectus is a way of communicating your specific plans. If your work will be done in Utah, a clearance form must be completed (obtained from the EAC, 120 MCKB) and signed BEFORE you may begin work in the schools. Policies of other states regarding the approval of research projects conducted in the public schools may vary and must be determined and followed by the candidate.

A prospectus should answer five general questions:

1. What problem or need is the project intended to resolve?
2. How does the project relate to previously reported work and why does it need to be conducted?
3. How will the project be conducted?
4. What resources will be required (money, time, materials, equipment, personnel, etc.)?
5. What benefits will likely result?

The application of these five generic questions varies from one type of project to another. Specific guidelines for each of four types of projects are presented in the following sections.

Prospectus for a Development Project

The prospectus for a proposed development project should include the following:

1. Statement of the problem
 - a. Show that there is a need for the proposed product.
 - b. Indicate how you propose to meet this need more efficiently or more effectively than it has been met in the past.
2. Statement of the purpose of the instructional materials.
 - a. Describe the terminal objectives, goals or learning outcomes.
 - b. Describe the sub-objectives.
3. Description of the characteristics of the target audience for the instruction.
4. Description of the general nature of the instructional materials to be developed.
 - a. Main components of the product.
 - b. Media to be used to deliver the instruction and rationale for its selection.
 - c. Proposed instructional strategy.
5. Description of the procedures to be employed in evaluating the product.
 - a. Formative evaluation.
 - b. Summative evaluation.
6. Proposed schedule for completing the project.
 - a. List the various activities or phases of the project.
 - b. Indicate the starting and completion date for each activity.
 - c. Indicate the number of person hours you anticipate will be required to complete each activity.
7. Proposed budget for the project.
 - a. Personnel costs (student's and any consultant's).
 - b. Travel expenses, if any.
 - c. Materials
 - d. Phone

Prospectus for an Evaluation Project

A prospectus for a proposed evaluation project should include the following:

1. A brief description of the program to be evaluated including:
 - a. The mission, purposes, goals, or objectives of the program.
 - b. The target population the program is intended to serve.
 - c. The main activities or components of the program.
 - d. The sponsor(s) and funding source(s).
 - e. The primary audiences for whom the evaluation will be conducted and other important stakeholders that should be considered.
2. Reasons why the program needs to be evaluated and an assessment of the degree to which it is evaluable.

3. The primary issues, concerns, or questions on which the evaluation will focus.
4. The methods, instruments, and procedures to be used to collect and analyze data which will permit you to answer the various questions or address the issues and concerns identified.
5. How and to whom the results will be reported.
6. A schedule for conducting the study.
7. A budget showing the estimated costs of conducting the evaluation.

Prospectus for a Research Project

Educational research includes true experiments, quasi-experiments, sample surveys, case studies, ethnographics, historical studies, philosophical analyses, policy analyses, comparative cross-cultural analyses, and integrative, meta-analyses of primary research. All of these approaches are forms of disciplined inquiry aimed at improving educational phenomena. Each of them is a rational activity involving systematic analysis and interpretation of evidence as a means of clarifying or resolving some unsettled issue or problem. In each case, the validity of the researcher's conclusions are dependent upon the adequacy of his conceptualization of the problem, the clarity of his definitions, the adequacy of the evidence used, and the degree to which other plausible interpretation can be reasonably discounted.

A prospectus for a proposed research project should include:

1. A clear statement of the problem the study is intended to resolve accompanied by:
 - a. An explanation of the practical or theoretical significance of this problem.
 - b. A list of the research questions, objectives (purposes), or hypotheses on which the study will focus.
 - c. Definitions of the main concepts or variables to be analyzed or investigated.
2. A brief summary of the previously-conducted, closely-related research or a description of the research literature to be reviewed.
3. A detailed description of the procedures to be used:
 - a. For quantitative-empirical studies this should include:
 - 1) A description of the population about which you wish to make inferences.
 - 2) The research design to be used.
 - 3) The various kinds of data that will be gathered and the methods and instruments to be used in collecting this data.
 - 4) The analysis procedure or test-statistic that will be used for each hypothesis or question.
 - b. For qualitative studies this section should include:
 - 1) The type of role the investigator plans to assume.
 - 2) The specific contexts or settings to be investigated and the data collection procedures to be used.
 - 3) The data analysis and cross-validation procedures to be used.

- c. For analytical studies this section should include:
 - 1) The primary and secondary sources to be analyzed.
 - 2) The analytical procedures to be employed.
 - 3) Criteria and procedures for judging the validity of the conclusions and the adequacy of the procedures used.
- 4. A schedule for conducting the study that indicates the steps to be taken, the sequence in which they will occur, and the estimated length of time required for each.
- 5. A budget indicating the estimated costs to be incurred.

Prospectus for a Measurement Project

A prospectus for a proposed measurement project should include:

1. A brief description of the instrument or procedure to be developed accompanied by:
 - a. An operational definition of the construct, property, or competency to be measured.
 - b. The purposes to be served by the instrument or procedure.
 - c. The target population to be assessed.
 - d. Prospective users of the instrument or procedure.
2. A justification and rationale for creating a new instrument:
 - a. Describe any currently existing instruments or procedures which measure this property and show why there is a need for the proposed instrument or procedure.
 - b. Describe why you think this need can be better satisfied with the proposed instrument or procedure.
3. A description of the procedures to be used to:
 - a. Analyze the construct, develop a set of test specifications, and obtain reviews of these specifications.
 - b. Prepare, conduct initial tryouts, and obtain reviews of a draft version of the instrument or procedure.
 - c. Make revisions and prepare final forms.
 - d. Collect and analyze reliability and validity data and other relevant data for a technical report.

The general guide for writing papers, prospectus, reports, and dissertations for the Ph.D. and M.S. programs in the Department of Instructional Psychology & Technology is the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (3rd Edition, 1983). Chapter 2 of this handbook provides helpful guidance about writing style and grammar. Chapters 3 and 4 provide guidance regarding the use of headings, abbreviations, quotations, footnotes, and reference citations plus helpful directions for preparing tables, figures and the list of references. In preparing your prospectus you should adhere to the guidelines in these three chapters except those specifically countermanded in section A.03 of the appendix (pp. 191-192). If your prospectus includes tables or figures, they should be incorporated into the body of the text as discussed in section A.03. The suggestions in section A.03 regarding single-spacing and pagination should also be followed.

Other tools which may be helpful to you in writing your prospectus include the following sources:

Barzun, J. (1975). Simple and direct. New York: Harper & Row.

Bernstein, T.M. (1965). The careful writer: A modern guide to English usage. New York: Atheneum.

Fowler, H.W. (1965). A dictionary of modern English usage. (2nd ed. by E. Gowers). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Krathwohl, D.R. (1977). How to prepare a research proposal. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Bookstore.

Sherman, T.A. & Johnson, S.S. (1983). Modern technical writing (4th ed). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Strunck, W. Jr., & White, E.B. (2000). The elements of style (4th Ed.). New York: Macmillan.