How to Prepare a Dissertation Proposal

Suggestions for Students in Education & the Social and Behavioral Sciences

David R. Krathwohl & Nick L. Smith

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HOW SHOULD YOU READ THIS BOOK?

This book will guide you through the steps of drafting a dissertation proposal. It is an assembly manual that will (1) identify and explain the components of a dissertation proposal, (2) assist you in constructing the needed elements, and (3) guide you in combining the pieces to produce a complete and convincing proposal. There are several ways you can use this book.

> "I learn best when you tell me what to do, give me some examples to study, and then show me how to practice it."

> "I like to figure out how to do things for myself from some examples and then check my process against the instructions to be sure I didn't miss anything."

> "An example and a checklist are worth a thousand words of instruction!"

Would you just as soon be given instructions and then see some illustrations of their use? Or are you one of those people who learns best from examples? Or does your preference depend on the material you are mastering? Depending on how you prefer to learn, you may want to read this book's chapters in an atypical order. Let us explain why this is so.

This book is organized into six parts. Part 1 deals with the definition of a proposal, its different functions, and the basic logic that underlies many studies. Everyone should start with it.

Part 2 presents the core elements of any proposal, the problem statement and the method statement, while part 3 shows how those elements are modified to convey the strengths of particular kinds of studies, such as qualitative investigations, experimental tests, demonstrations, etc.

Part 4 both explains the additional material needed to complete a full proposal and discusses the process of getting your proposal reviewed and approved.

Part 5 reproduces three actual student proposals of different types (chapters: 11, Warters; 12, Beissner; and 13, Phelan) with interspersed annotations that refer back to the advice given in parts 2, 3, and 4.

Part 6 discusses getting the proposal funded.

Most of us expect to have a procedure explained and then be shown examples of its application. Those of you who prefer this will want to proceed by reading parts 1, 2, 3, and 4 in order, looking ahead to see how those ideas are implemented in the annotated student proposals of part 5. We have provided worksheets at the end of each chapter in parts 1, 2, 3, and 4 to help you make practical use of the material you have just read.

If you empathized with the quotes above about starting with examples, however, after reading part 1, you may want to proceed to part 5, first working through the examples and then reading parts 2, 3, and 4 to see in more detail the rationale for the annotations. If you learn best by working on specific tasks related to a problem, then you may want to pay particular attention to the worksheets at the end of each chapter. They will help you work through each step in the process and give you a checklist for reviewing your progress.

Maybe you'll want to work back and forth between the parts as you proceed. Since parts 2 and 3 frequently cite examples in the annotated proposals of part 5 to show what is meant by their advice, and since part 5 indicates where in parts 2 and 3 the topic of the annotation is covered, it is easy to move back and forth between them. So you may choose this alternative. See what works best for you.

Remember that this is a "how-to-do-it" instruction manual. You don't read an instruction manual just once, but alternately refer to different sections as you encounter various parts of the assembly process. For example, if you are designing a quantitative experimental study as part of your dissertation, you will probably need to refer repeatedly to part 3, chapter 8, on experiments and to the corresponding sample proposal in part 5, chapter 12. Read through the book once, then use it selectively to assemble your own proposal.

If you are reading the book selectively, concentrating on those parts that seem most relevant to your situation, you may miss two discussions of importance. One concerns the problem of "how much is enough for a dissertation." While this is discussed in the context of philosophical and historical studies, it can be a problem in almost any type of study, so include pp. 139–41 in your reading. Include as well pp. 115–16 that refer to the problem of doing the pro-

posal after the dissertation is started, which you may consider doing. Also don't forget to consult part 6 if you anticipate needing additional resources to support your work.

AN ASSEMBLY MANUAL WITH A DIFFERENCE

We have referred to this book as an assembly manual. But where our usual conception of a manual is something that guides you mechanically through a series of steps, this manual is much more than that. We want you to understand the "why" of what is called for, how your proposal can advance your relations with your faculty mentors, how each part of the proposal fits into and contributes to a larger whole, and the logic that constitutes the larger whole that will be represented in your proposal. If you understand the "whys" and bear in mind the logic of the larger picture, then as you formulate the steps in your proposal you will be able to creatively translate what is suggested here into what you propose to do. So, yes, this is an assembly manual, but one with a difference.

WHAT DO WE ASSUME YOU BRING TO READING THE BOOK?

An assembly manual, whether for assembling a child's swing set, a new computer system, or a dissertation proposal, must assume that the user has all the needed materials, tools, and skills at hand to do the work. In writing this book, we too have had to make certain assumptions about what background you bring to it. Specifically, we assume:

1. You already have a dissertation topic or know enough about a possible topic that you can sort among the various dissertation proposal formats to find the one or those few that are relevant to your study. In order to develop an effective proposal, you must tailor it to the specific details of a particular problem.

2. You have had enough research background and are willing to look up the appropriate references when you come across a research aspect you don't understand, so that we don't have to make this both a research text as well as a "how-to" manual.

We make the first assumption because we start the book at that point in the dissertation process where you either are close to having a topic or already have one. For this reason, we did not include a chapter on finding a dissertation topic. If you are still looking for one, reading chapter 5, "Finding a Problem," in Krathwohl (1998/2004) or a similar chapter in a research methods book may help you.

Why the second assumption? Because in order to include all the background provided in a research methods text would have produced a book requiring you to reinforce your bookshelf. When providing advice regarding a

part of the proposal, we try to supply enough detail for you to know what to write about and how to describe it without going into the detail you would expect to find in a research text.

A good example of the boundaries of this book's coverage is the matter of ruling out alternative explanations. If you are explaining a phenomenon, you don't want your explanation to be rivaled by a plausible alternative. We have supplied one or two examples so that you are clear about what we mean by alternative explanations. But there are many, many others we don't mention. If you don't know the ones to protect against in your study, you need to find out about them by reviewing a research methods text, studying prior research, or consulting a fellow researcher.

Another boundary example: As a proposal assembly manual, this book will demonstrate how the results of your literature review should be used in the proposal to strengthen your research argument, but it will not provide instruction on how to conduct literature searches. Further, the book emphasizes the importance of clear, direct, well-written English in producing a convincing proposal, but does not offer instruction in how to write well. The goal of this book, therefore, is to help you with the specific task of assembling an effective dissertation proposal, and so it assumes you either have certain required related knowledge and skills or will seek out and acquire them.

WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT THIS BOOK?

Here are some of the distinctive aspects of this book:

1. *The definition of a proposal and the variety of its functions.* We all have some idea of what a proposal is, but chapters 1 and 2 challenge you to consider it more broadly. The definition presented in chapter 1 is curious and thought provoking, deals with both attitude and content, and has implications for how the proposal is written. The different functions a proposal can serve described in chapter 2 also affect how it is written, as well as how it is judged by various audiences.

2. *How the chain of reasoning organizes and integrates the proposal.* One of the most important functions of the proposal is to present a rationale for the study. Chapter 3 shows how the presentation of that rationale (as well as how you later present the findings of your study) is analogous to a particular pattern of metal chain, its properties and characteristics. Keeping the chain analogy in mind helps you develop a strong and integrated proposal.

3. *How to write the various parts of the proposal is described in detail.* Chapters 4 and 5 describe in considerable detail what is to be included in the core sections of the proposal. Chapter 4 describes how you present what you hope to study and shows how it builds on past research. Chapter 5 indicates how you describe what you will operationally do in pursuing the problem. Chapter 6 provides the various assurances that your chair, committee, and institution need in

order to feel confident that you have appropriate background knowledge, adequate understanding of your procedure, every intent to observe ethical cautions, and adequate time and fiscal resources. Chapter 10 gives tips and invites consideration of other aspects of the process not covered elsewhere.

4. *How to adapt the typical proposal format to a wide variety of types of studies.* Chapters 7 through 9 discuss how the proposal differs depending on the types of studies that can be pursued for the doctorate. Chapter 7 does this for qualitative studies such as case studies, philosophical and conceptual studies, and historical investigations. Chapter 8 does the same for quantitative investigations such as experimental, causal modeling, and meta-analysis studies. Chapter 9 likewise covers studies that combine both qualitative and quantitative approaches such as sample survey studies, evaluation studies, development projects, and demonstration and action projects.

5. *The inclusion of annotated sample proposals.* Because so much can be learned from examples, this book includes not just one, but three annotated proposals, each different with respect to method and topic.

6. *Worksheets for working through the proposal development process.* The worksheets provided with each chapter help you put the material just presented into actual practice. Collectively, they guide you through the development process and provide you with criteria for checking your progress.

In this book, we have provided a variety of paths and tools to help you in putting together a convincing and effective dissertation proposal. Become familiar with the entire volume, so you can refer to the separate chapters as needed in assembling your proposal.

Remember that complicated products often require refitting and reassembly until the parts fit just as you want them. Developing a dissertation proposal is a complicated and difficult task, but with persistence, you can produce a proposal to be proud of. Good luck!

PART ONE

Concepts Fundamental to Proposal Writing

Before preparing your proposal, you should become familiar with the information in this part; it provides concepts fundamental to all proposals. It may also broaden your conception of what proposals are and the variety of problems they encompass. This part consists of three chapters:

Chapter 1 defines a dissertation proposal in terms you may not have considered.

Chapter 2 describes the functions that are served by proposals and how these functions may vary depending on the kind of problem posed. A fundamental function served by all proposals is the presentation of an argument to justify conducting the study.

Chapter 3 describes how presenting that argument is like a chain of reasoning and explores some of the consequences of that analogy for writing the proposal.

CHAPTER 1

What Is a Proposal?

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DEFINITION OF A PROPOSAL

What is a proposal? "That's obvious," you say, "let's get on with it!" We would agree with you, except that it always pays to have a precise idea of where one is going; it makes it so much easier to get there! So here are some things to consider:

- What you will be proposing as your dissertation research has never been done exactly as you propose to do it. So you, your doctoral chairperson, and your committee[1] are sharing some risk if it is approved. Shared decision making is a much more appropriate frame of mind when professional reputations, energy, time, and resources are ventured by both sides.
- Sharing the decision making takes maximum advantage of your chairperson's and committee's ability to test the worth of the ideas you pro-

1. Institutions vary; some require a committee that works with a chairperson to guide the student's work, some require only a chairperson, or advisor, and use readers to review the final product. All, however, require someone who serves as a mentor. Throughout this book we will refer to the mentor as chairperson, and those who work with her as the committee. Note also that because of the lack of a neutral pronoun, masculine and feminine forms will be used randomly throughout the book to avoid the awkward "he/she" and "his/her" forms of expression.

pose. Students who approach the presentation of their ideas more as a hurdle requiring a strong sales pitch than as a chance to try them out lose this advantage.

- A sales job may not stand up on sober reflection, but a carefully formulated problem is more likely to. Indeed, if you later need to make substantial changes or get help or additional resources, a solidly based document is more likely to result in the chairperson's and committee's serious commitment to the project—a stance conducive to getting the help you need. Further, proposal development is part of the process of building your relationship with your chairperson in particular and your committee in general. You want those relations to be solid!
- If, even though you have presented your ideas adequately, your chairperson (and/or your committee) turns the proposal down for substantive reasons, she may have done you a favor (although it may take a bit of time to realize it). You may have been saved from venturing a substantial amount of your time and energy in a useless quest. Shared decision making may save you a misstep.

As noted below, you will have chosen your dissertation chairperson and committee members for their experience and special qualifications for making the judgments needed to guide and improve the quality of your work. Since they also function as gatekeepers to the profession, some students may view them with apprehension. In reality, faculty want good ideas to succeed. Indeed, having accepted membership on your committee, they want you to succeed. In addition to their interest in you as a person, your success reflects favorably on them! Keeping their concern for you in mind results in a more positive attitude; let that attitude show through in your writing!

All of the above assumes that in the proposal you presented your case in such a way that the chairperson and committee could fully encounter it and could make what you consider a fair judgment based on their perceptions of the ideas and actions that you intend. Someone once said, "Books exist in the minds of readers. It really doesn't matter what the author intended at all." Of course it matters! It matters a great deal to you. You want what "exists in the minds of readers" to be what you meant. It is because the reviewer's image of both the proposal and the proposer is so often not what was intended—the case for the study was not made as well as it could have been—that books like this have value. Adequate and appropriate presentation of an idea is a skill that can be learned. This book's intent is to help you learn it.

So we have begun defining a proposal by explaining some considerations underlying it. To help you with the material that follows, however, we need a more explicit definition, one that is compatible with the considerations with which we began yet amplifies and specifies what is to be done. So, what is a proposal?

> Basically, a dissertation proposal describes a plan of work to learn something of real or potential significance about an area of interest. It is a logical presentation. Its opening problem statement draws the reader into the plan: showing its significance, describing how it builds upon previous work (both substantively and methodologically), and outlining the investigation. The overall plan of action flows from the problem statement: specific steps are described in the methods section, their sequence is illuminated graphically in the work plan (and, if one is included, by the time schedule), and their feasibility is shown by the availability of resources. The enthusiasm of the proposal carries the reader along; the reader is impressed with the proposal's perspective on the problem, is reassured by the technical and scholarly competence shown, and is provided with a model of the clarity of thought and writing that can be expected in the final write-up. The reader comes away feeling that the opportunity to support this research should not be missed.

Perhaps you are thinking, "That is a great definition, but hardly compatible with all the talk about not being a sales pitch!" Not true. First, it simply recognizes that if you are not enthusiastic about your ideas, you cannot expect others to be. Material can be written interestingly and still presented with integrity. Your writing doesn't have to be boring to be good.

Second, the definition points out that the proposal is an integrated chain of reasoning that makes strong logical connections between your problem statement and the coherent plan of action you are proposing to undertake. This point is discussed further in chapter 3.

Third, as this modified definition makes clear, it is not only your idea and action plan that are subject to consideration, but also your capability to successfully carry them through.

Alright now, let's pull it together and add a few realities. Once more, "What is a proposal?"

> Your dissertation proposal is an opportunity for you to present your idea and proposed actions for consideration in a shared decision-making situation. You, with all the integrity at your command, are helping your chairperson and/or doctoral committee to see how you view the situation, how the work you propose fills a need, how it builds on what has been done before, how it will proceed, how pitfalls will be avoided, why pitfalls not avoided are not a serious threat, what the consequences of your efforts are likely to be, and what significance they are likely to have. It is a carefully prepared, enthusiastic, interestingly written, skillful presentation. Your presentation displays your ability to assemble the foregoing materials into an internally consistent chain of reasoning.

Is that what you thought a proposal was? Well, whether it was or not, now you know where we want to go. And that makes it easier to get there. Helping you get there is what this book is about.

TYPICAL DISSERTATION PROPOSAL SECTIONS

The content and format of dissertation proposals vary across institutions, departments, and committees. Some have strict requirements or formal guidelines, while others allow the student considerable latitude. Although we present a range of alternatives, to learn what is expected of you, you should search out your school's officially stated requirements, review prior proposals accepted in your department, and discuss expectations with your chairperson.

A conventional format of a completed dissertation consists of five chapters:

Chapter 1: Problem Statement
Chapter 2: Literature Review
Chapter 3: Method Statement
Chapter 4: Study Results
Chapter 5: Interpretation and Conclusions

Some departments therefore expect the dissertation proposal to consist of the first three chapters of the final dissertation, either in annotated outline form, substantially developed, or possibly even in full draft form. (The reasons for some of these requirements are discussed further in the next chapter.) Students are often allowed, or even encouraged, to develop a *prospectus* prior to the development of the full proposal. The prospectus provides an overview of the same topics as the Problem Statement, Literature Review, and Method Statement, but in a much abbreviated two—to ten-page presentation. A prospectus is especially useful for initiating discussions about possible dissertation studies, recruiting dissertation committee members, and soliciting potential study participants.

OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION PROPOSAL PROCESS

Producing a dissertation proposal involves not only preparing the proposal document, but also preparing yourself to do the dissertation research.

Preparing Yourself

Before even considering a dissertation proposal, of course, you have spent several years of graduate education preparing to do a dissertation study. You will continue to improve your knowledge and skills throughout the proposal development process, the actual dissertation study, and the rest of your professional career. At this point, the key question is, "How prepared are you to begin the proposal development process?" To what extent have you already:

Developed a research interest? Completing a dissertation requires a major time, resource, and ego investment; do you have a dissertation topic of sufficiently strong personal interest? If not, how close are you to finding one?

Accumulated required knowledge? Do you have or do you still need to attain adequate knowledge about the phenomena and problem of interest? About how others have studied this problem? About your own motivation, inquiry skills, work style and preferences?

Acquired Necessary Skills? Considering your possible research, do you have, or will you need to develop, sufficient skills to conduct literature searches, design studies, develop instrumentation, create interventions and treatments, collect and analyze data, communicate orally and in technical writing, use computers and technology, and manage resources and time?

Garnered Adequate Resources? Do you have, or can you obtain, the resources needed to develop the proposal, including technical assistance (including a chairperson), study resources, and sufficient time, financial, and personal support to develop the proposal?

How well prepared should you be *before* starting to develop the proposal, as opposed to developing the needed knowledge and skills as you work on the proposal? The answer varies, and this is a good question to discuss with your chairperson, researchers working in your area of interest, and fellow students already past the proposal development stage.

Part of what makes doing dissertations interesting is the occurrence of the unexpected. So you can't prepare for every eventuality, but adequate preparation makes the process easier. Therefore, we have provided Worksheet 1.1: Self-Assessment and Worksheet 1.2: Environmental Assessment to help you review your readiness to begin drafting the dissertation proposal. Think of them as assembly-manual lists that ensure you will have the necessary parts when you begin the assembly process.

There are a variety of ways of gaining this assurance. Additional course work is often the fastest and most efficient way to make major improvements in knowledge or skills, but also consider independent study, tutoring, workshops and short-term training sessions, and consultant help. If, more than further instruction, you need increased experience with your topic of interest and how to research it, then consider apprenticeships, volunteer positions, on-the-job training, and, of course, pilot testing some of your preliminary ideas. Nothing improves a proposal like drawing on your own personal experiences of what does and does not work.

Preparing the Proposal

So you are ready to start on the proposal; how do you proceed? It is true that your proposal will typically follow a logical chain of reasoning from problem to literature review to method, etc. But, depending on circumstances, the process of its preparation may start in any number of places such as reviewing the liter-

ature, investigating research methods, or working to understand the problem better through observation or pilot studies.

The central task of the proposal preparation process is to transform a personal interest into a researchable problem: dissertation studies are typically constructed, not discovered. They develop through a process of reading, writing, review and discussion, rewriting, further discussion, additional reading, redrafting, and so on. The work of this process is *thinking;* the proposal document records the results of that thinking.

- Reading is important; read selectively and critically to gain understanding and insight.
- Writing is important; use it as a means of clarifying and making explicit your own ideas so you can communicate them to others.
- Reviews and discussions are important; use them to capture the strengths and repair the weaknesses of your and others' thinking.

You redraft and rethink, move from problem analysis to method considerations and back again, until an acceptable balance of study importance, technical quality, and practical feasibility is reached.

Although this describes the internal process of proposal development, there are also common external milestones of progress. While this process varies, the following describes typical events in developing a dissertation proposal.

1. After relevant course work, extensive reading, and informal conversations, the student either verbally tries out or drafts an initial "think piece" about a possible dissertation topic.
2. The student works with the chairperson through successive drafts to develop a short but adequate prospectus.
3. The prospectus is used to feel out potential committee members regarding their interest, the student's likely compatibility with them, and their suggestions for further revisions.
4. The student works with the chairperson and committee to further develop the problem and method statements.
5. The chairperson and committee give the student provisional approval for initial field and development work.
6. The student works to develop the full proposal, possibly including development of instrumentation, interventions, or treatments; initial qualitative fieldwork; development and submission of Institutional Review Board clearances; and the design and conduct of pilot tests.
7. The student increasingly interacts with professional colleagues: peers for personal support, other researchers for procedural advice, and methodologists for assistance with instrument development, data collection, analysis plans, etc.

8. With the chairperson's prior approval, the student presents and defends the full dissertation proposal, either at a meeting of just the committee or possibly at a public oral defense.
9. After making requested revisions, obtaining all required permissions and approvals, and possibly submitting the proposal for external funding, the student proceeds to implement the proposal and conduct the dissertation research.

There are also subtle aspects of this process not made explicit in the above steps that require an understanding of the variety of functions the proposal serves in addition to providing one a "green light" on the road to a degree—a topic we take up in the next chapter.

WORKSHEET 1.1

Self-Assessment

Am I Ready to Begin the Dissertation Proposal?

For each item in the table, rate your level of preparation, and note how you could become better prepared to begin working on the dissertation proposal.

How Well Prepared Am I?	Strong–Ready to Go	Adequate–Good Enough To Start	Weak–I Need To Work on This	To Strengthen This Area, I Should:	Already Past This Point or Don't Plan or Need to Do
Do I Have Sufficient Knowledge To . . . ?					
Identify a short list of important, feasible, and personally interesting dissertation topics?					
Specify in some detail the nature and importance of each topic?					
Briefly summarize enough of the relevant empirical research, theoretical positions, and practical knowledge to help choose among these topics?					
Discuss general research approaches possibly relevant to studying these topics?					
Discuss my personal interest in these subjects as dissertation topics?					
Discuss how my current motivation, circumstances, and work style may both help and hinder me in completing the proposal?					

(Continued on next page)

How Well Prepared Am I?	Strong–Ready to Go	Adequate–Good Enough To Start	Weak–I Need To Work on This	To Strengthen This Area, I Should:	Already Past This Point or Don't Plan or Need to Do
Do I Have Sufficient Skills To...?					
Conduct a paper-based literature search?					
Conduct a computer-based literature search using electronic databases and the Internet?					
Use software to assist in analyzing the relevant literature?					
Conduct a meta-analysis of empirical research?					
Critique alternative inquiry approaches possibly appropriate to my topics?					
Discuss the purposes, strengths, weaknesses, and necessary conditions of alternative study designs appropriate to my topics?					
Select, develop, and implement data collection procedures needed for my study?					
Select or develop any instrumentation needed for my study?					
Analyze and interpret the different kinds of data I may collect in my study?					

(Continued on next page)

How Well Prepared Am I?	Strong–Ready to Go	Adequate–Good Enough To Start	Weak–I Need To Work on This	To Strengthen This Area, I Should:	Already Past This Point or Don't Plan or Need to Do
Use appropriate equipment, including computers, needed in my study?					
Communicate effectively, orally and in writing, with my chairperson, committee members, colleagues, and study participants?					
Write effectively in professional technical English (i.e. the language of the written dissertation)?					
Manage my proposal and study time and resources in light of competing professional, occupational, familial, social, religious, and personal demands?					

WORKSHEET 1.2

Environmental Assessment

What Resources Are Available?

For each item in the table, rate how sufficient the resource is, and note what steps you can take to increase needed resources before starting on the proposal.

What Resources Are Available?	Plenty–Ready to Go	Adequate–Enough to Get Started	Weak–More Help Is Needed Here	To Strengthen This Resource I Should:
Do I Have Sufficient Resources To . . . ?				
Devote significant time each week working on the proposal and dissertation study?				
Devote significant time over several months or years working on the proposal and dissertation study?				
Financially support my self and family while working on the proposal and dissertation study?				
Maintain the needed emotional and personal support required to complete the proposal and dissertation study?				
Are There Sufficient Resources Available to Me in Terms of . . . ?				
Relevant instructional courses?				
Qualified, interested, and available faculty mentors, chairperson, and committee members?				
Technical assistance with computers, research methods, and writing skills?				

(Continued on next page)

What Resources Are Available?	Plenty–Ready to Go	Adequate–Enough to Get Started	Weak–More Help Is Needed Here	To Strengthen This Resource I Should:
Work setting?				
Computer facilities?				
Laboratory facilities?				
Library resources?				
Field settings and study participants?				

CHAPTER 2

The Functions of a Dissertation Proposal

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In this chapter, we review the various functions a proposal can serve in the dissertation process, and how those functions may differ depending on the type of inquiry being proposed. Student examples illustrate some of these differences.

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE PROPOSAL IN THE DISSERTATION PROCESS

Anna[1] was proud of her new dissertation proposal. It had been completed just two weeks after she had started her doctoral program; in fact, approval by a faculty committee was required before she could officially begin her doctoral studies. Having learned about the kind of research her mentors conducted, she had indicated her desire to do similar research, and, after discussing possible projects, had agreed to the work described in her new dissertation proposal. The eight-page statement, which had been

1. Because the student examples provided throughout the book are based on actual cases, names and personal details have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

drafted by two faculty members who were to serve as her mentors and supervisors, included a description of the background of the problem, research questions, and a general scope of proposed work. Anna's name did not appear in the document because it would be submitted for funding by her mentors. On receiving the grant, they would employ her for the next four years to study, design, implement, evaluate, and produce research related to alternative coaching procedures for teacher professional development in four international settings.

In contrast, after more than two years of doctoral courses, Laura was still uncertain about her dissertation topic. Her interests were varied, and she had approached several faculty members about the possibility of their working with her. Because she was an outstanding student, most faculty members expressed interest and support, but asked for greater clarity about the nature of her possible research. After choosing an advisor who had agreed to help her through the proposal development process, she decided to conduct extensive field interviews and collect other data in order to find a focus within her general concern, the professional development of medical personnel. As she learned more, however, her shifting interests were reflected in multiple proposal revisions and a changing cast of possible faculty mentors. Finally, after months of difficult fieldwork, Laura produced an extensive dissertation proposal that reflected considerable sophistication about the topic of her research and enabled her to gain the agreement of several faculty members to assist her.

Anna's story reflects an instance in which a dissertation proposal is simply a statement of planned work out of which the student's deeper understanding is to emerge as the problem is engaged (indeed, it is quite possible that the plan of work will change as the work unfolds). This pattern, where the faculty set the problem, is more common in the natural and physical sciences. Laura's story reflects significant understanding of her research problem. This pattern, where the student sets the problem, is common in the social sciences and humanities and is the pattern to which the bulk of this book is addressed. In both cases, however, the proposal provides a set of boundaries for actually doing the dissertation work.

Clearly, *boundary setting* is one role of the proposal, and that enters into some of the other multiple purposes the proposal may play in the dissertation process. This chapter identifies seven possible functions:

- Justification for the dissertation study
- Work plan
- Evidence of ability
- Request for commitment
- Contract
- Evaluative criterion
- Partial dissertation draft

The Proposal as Justification for the Study

> A sound argument, a well-grounded or firmly-backed claim, is one which will stand up to criticism . . . [and] deserve[s] a favourable verdict. (Toulmin, 1958, p. 8)

Researchers employ theory, method, evidence, and reasoning to produce findings they claim are important and relevant to the questions of interest. The reasoning producing the findings and relating them to the problem constitutes an argument that is the heart of the dissertation proposal. This argument justifies conducting the study and supports the meaning and utility of the results found. The primary function of the dissertation proposal, then, is to provide this justification for the inquiry.

Therefore, in doing the study, the student develops the following points into a reasoned argument:

1. Why it is worth studying what will be studied.
2. What is already known, how that relates to the proposed study, and how it coalesces into an argument for:
   a. an extrapolation of past knowledge to predict the outcome of the study,
   b. or, if not a prediction, some anticipation of possible outcomes,
   c. or knowledge of where to look for results,
   d. or knowledge of what area to study in order to likely attain payoff.

   (If much is known about what is to be researched, a, above, is possible. With less prior knowledge, one falls back to b, with still less to c, and finally to d.)
3. How the study will proceed: what method will be used; data gathered; and situations, circumstances, and persons involved.
4. How those data represent future situations, circumstances, and/or persons in such a way as to relate usefully and meaningfully to the problem, question, or area of investigation proposed.

As might be expected, these points relate to the proposal as well as to the dissertation study itself. The first three points are covered in the proposal, the fourth in the dissertation report. As discussed in the next chapter, designing the proposal as a chain of reasoning is an effective way of providing a strong justification for the dissertation study.

The Proposal as Work Plan

This is the most common function a proposal serves. It sets forth what work will be done, why, and with what anticipated result. Most proposals include a scope of work, a list of activities, and possibly a time line and budget. These in-

dicate how the student plans to proceed. The work plan allows faculty to judge the investigation's importance, feasibility, efficiency, and likely success. The material in the following sections of this book will assist you in developing a strong work plan.

The Proposal as Evidence of Ability

A dissertation proposal may also serve as evidence of ability—the student's knowledge of the topic, understanding of the relevant literature, grasp of appropriate inquiry procedures and methods, analytic and design skills, and, certainly, organizational and writing skills are all reflected in the proposal. A student who produces a strong proposal in these respects can have greater confidence that she is indeed prepared to undertake the proposed inquiry. And the faculty, by assessing the proposal's clarity, organization, attention to detail, originality, and level of sophistication, can judge the student's current state of readiness and her need for additional preparation, support, or supervision.

Both Anna's and Laura's dissertation proposals served as work plans, but only Laura's was used as a means of providing evidence of her ability to carry out the planned research. Her proposal helped to certify to the faculty that, after months of extensive investigation and fieldwork, she was prepared to proceed with the full study. In Anna's doctoral program, students were expected to develop all needed abilities as the dissertation proceeded. When she started her dissertation, Anna did not yet have the abilities needed to write "her" proposal.

The Proposal as Request for Commitment

As mentioned earlier, a draft prospectus may be used to identify persons who might serve as collaborators, consultants, or participants in the inquiry. A more complete version may be used to solicit faculty participation on the dissertation committee. Either of these versions may be useful in gaining the approval of gatekeepers of sites from which one hopes to collect data. Often they like to see it in less than final form so they may suggest changes. This both makes the project more acceptable to them and gives them a sense of partial ownership of it. The latter is equally true of faculty being sought as dissertation committee members. As noted below, it also commits the faculty to helping the student meet the challenges the project will present. A full draft of the proposal may be used to seek financial or institutional support.

The Proposal as Contract

A proposal may come to serve as a contract as it changes from a request for commitment to an accepted agreement of work to be done. Approval of the proposal may entail faculty and institutional obligation to provide support, resources, and ultimately a doctoral degree if the work is completed as pro-

posed.[2] Because approval by the dissertation committee may constitute an institutional contract to accept the basic elements of the proposal, a dissertation committee may be particularly careful to ensure that the proposed study is well designed, complies with institutional guidelines and local norms, and is feasible.

> Both Anna's and Laura's proposals served as requests for commitment and subsequently as contracts, but in different ways. In accepting their proposals, the students were expected to conduct the work as outlined in their respective documents. Anna's proposal contained less detail, providing her greater room for subsequent change, but less direction on how to proceed, making her more dependent on her mentors. Laura's proposal was very procedurally specific and detailed, reflecting a direction she had chosen and was now committed to seeing through.
>
> In both cases, the faculty made commitments to work with the student, but Anna's mentors were agreeing to provide intensive training, consultation, and supervision in her conduct of a study related to their own research. Laura had used early versions of her proposal to identify and solicit faculty to work with her. Her committee was serving more at her invitation to assist in a dissertation that was to be primarily under her direction and initiative. Anna's proposal included guaranteed financial support; Laura was promised only the resources of faculty time and expertise.

The Proposal as Evaluative Criterion

Once accepted, a dissertation proposal can become an evaluative criterion used to judge the direction and quality of the ensuing work. The more specific and detailed the proposal is, the more likely it will be used to monitor the progress of the inquiry. The student may be expected to implement the study as planned, inform the faculty of further details as she works them out, and provide justification when seeking approval for any major changes to the study as proposed. The proposal may also serve as an evaluative criterion in judging the quality of the final dissertation report. Consider Laura's and Anna's situations:

> Because of the detail contained in Laura's proposal, it was used as an evaluative criterion to monitor the progress and direction of her work. As her proposal continued to evolve, periodic restatements of the proposal were produced to ensure that she and her committee all shared the same understanding of the direction of her work. Although she was not forced to comply with the formally accepted proposal, she was required to document and justify any subsequent changes. Further, her proposal did include substantial sections of what were expected to be the first three chapters of her final report.

2. In some institutions, once the student's dissertation committee has formally accepted the proposal, all subsequent reviewers, even at the final dissertation hearing, must accept the basic design decisions contained in the accepted proposal.

Anna's proposal contained only an outline of work to be conducted over a four-year period, and so was not a strong criterion for judging either the progress or the final report of her dissertation. Because she had not written the proposal, it also provided no prior information on the nature or quality of her final report.

Other examples:

Jerry's dissertation committee criticized his final report as not living up to the high quality of work that he had shown in his proposal. They felt he had not taken his study seriously enough and that, in an attempt to finish quickly, he had not done his best work. (Note: Dissertation standards *may* be adjusted to what can be expected of each individual.)

Reviewers at her final dissertation defense criticized Lilly for implementing a study design with serious flaws. Since she had identified many of these flaws herself when she reviewed prior research in her proposal, it was charged that she had already given evidence that she knew better.

Franklin, an international student, had returned home to collect data after his proposal had been approved. He made several major changes to his study design without prior faculty approval. He provided a strong, convincing argument at his defense, however, that the approved proposal design had turned out to be infeasible in his home setting. His study changes gave evidence of his mastery of inquiry design principles and were applauded by his dissertation committee.

A committee member, anticipating using the proposal to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the dissertation study, may request greater procedural detail. A similarly concerned committee member may suggest that the student write the proposal to show sensitivity to possible changing conditions, flexibility to meet them, and, perhaps, how likely deviations from plans will be handled. A student, knowing how others may use the proposal as a criterion to judge her work, uses the opportunity to suggest the basis on which she wants to be judged and to describe the amount of flexibility from plans she anticipates needing.

The Proposal as Partial Dissertation Draft

Each student must adjust the final dissertation format to fit his study. As outlined in chapter 1, however, the conventional pattern employs five chapters:

- The first chapter covers what will be studied and why it is worth studying. It may also foreshadow what is to come in the remainder of the document.
- The second chapter reviews how far previous researchers have taken the

area and how the study relates to and builds on what they have done, both substantively and methodologically.
- The third chapter describes the study method and design.
- The fourth chapter describes what was found and presents the data processed so their meaning can be assessed.
- The fifth chapter interprets what was found in terms of the original study aims.

In some cases, dissertation advisors ask for a proposal that amounts to a partial dissertation draft—the first three chapters: statement of problem, review of the literature, and description of method.[3] Presumably, if there are subsequently no significant changes in the study's process or design, these three early chapter drafts can be used in the final dissertation report with only minor modifications.

For the faculty, a full three-chapter proposal provides the strongest basis for several of the functions of a proposal discussed above (for example, evidence of ability, contractual obligation, and subsequent evaluative criterion). For the student, substantial initial work is required without formal assurance that the study being planned will be acceptable, but once such a proposal is approved, the student is well on his way to completing the entire study.

More often, however, proposals provide a sketchier coverage of the study than the development of chapters implies. This better fits the level of knowledge of the student at the time the proposal is written, as well as allowing for the almost inevitable adjustments required later to fit newly revealed realities. This is less true, however, if the preparation of the proposal is preceded by a pilot study. For empirical studies, a pilot test enables the researcher to cycle through the entire study on a small scale so that an improved argument, inquiry process, and set of questions can be developed for the dissertation proposal. Let's look at Dana's pilot test study as an example of this sequence.

In simplified terms, Dana suspected that undergraduates would do better in philosophy classes if they produced study outlines of the various philosophers' positions they were studying. She developed an argument based on research and theory in cognitive processing, instructional design, and the structural nature of philosophy, which supported her claim that having the student construct outlines would improve both understanding and recall of philosophical positions.

She then designed a study to test her claims. She had an instructor teach students in a philosophy course how to construct study outlines, and, in a comparable course, the

3. Some advisors prefer a four-chapter dissertation format in which the problem statement and literature review are combined in the first chapter. In such cases, the proposal covers only the first two dissertation chapters, thus covering the same items.

same instructor had the students study as they usually did. Dana then ran a pilot test of her study and compared results from the students' course examinations in the two classes. She found no difference between the two groups.

At this point, Dana reexamined why she may have obtained the results she did. Was her argument flawed? (Perhaps outlining really didn't improve performance.) Was the study process she had used a poor way to test her claims? (Perhaps students in both groups already used outlining, or perhaps the course examinations were not a good measure of the kind of increased understanding that outlining provides.) Did the instructor attend more carefully to the class taught outlining?

Dana then went back to the research and theory on the topic, and clarified and strengthened her argument about what outlining should do and why. She developed more careful procedures to rule out the alternative explanations she was encountering (such as more clearly defining the difference in treatments) and developed better measures of the impact of outlining. Because of her pilot test experience, Dana's subsequent data collection and defense of her claims were based on a much more sophisticated argument and collection of evidence.

When Harry was asked at his final dissertation defense what was the one most important thing he had learned from his work, he responded in jest, "How to do this study right!" Seriously, however, that is probably one of the most important lessons you will learn from your dissertation study; pilot testing can help you learn it sooner and can dramatically increase the quality of your proposal and final study.

Summary

A dissertation proposal may serve several functions, then: as justification for the study, as work plan, as evidence of ability to conduct inquiry, as a request for commitment, as the basis for contractual agreements, as an evaluative criterion for judging the progress and final product, and even as a report of the portion of the dissertation work already completed. Anna's and Laura's proposals illustrate two different ways in which a proposal may serve some of these functions; there are, of course, countless other variations. All proposals share in common the first of these functions—they provide an argument that the proposed inquiry addresses a problem worth investigating, in a feasible way, and it is likely to produce meaningful and useful information. Proposals provide a justification for pursuing the proposed inquiry.

HOW FUNCTIONS DIFFER WITH DIFFERENT KINDS OF INQUIRY

An ever widening array of dissertation options reflects, in part, both the diversification of methods in the social sciences over the past half-century and the increased application of social science procedures to the solution of social

problems. As the range of acceptable dissertation inquiry has grown, some functions of the proposal are less important for certain kinds of studies, while other functions are more emphasized. We examine this variability in terms of (1) the extent to which the study can be planned in advance (prespecified vs. emergent studies), and (2) the extent to which study findings are intended to have general or more local application (general vs. local findings).

Prespecified vs. Emergent Studies

Some studies are painstakingly planned in advance; others are tailored as the inquiry progresses.

In *prespecified* studies, the questions of interest, arguments supporting the inquiry, and specific procedures of the inquiry are worked out at the beginning of the investigation. Once the design is established, the researcher implements the study, adhering to the original plan as closely as possible. Much of the traditional empirical research in the social sciences is of this kind.

Emergent studies have a long tradition in the humanities and in some branches of the social sciences. In emergent studies, the questions of interest, supporting arguments, and procedural details are worked out as the study proceeds. Such studies are most frequently employed to investigate natural variation, to study phenomena afresh and/or in all their normal complexity, or to explore phenomena to see what can be learned. Emergent designs may also be used because researchers lack prior knowledge of the phenomenon, methodological tools are inappropriate or lacking, or situational control is inadequate to conduct a prespecified study.

Studies need not be one or the other but may blend the two strategies, intentionally or inadvertently. A prespecified study may become more emergent as field controls break down, new information suggests that initial assumptions were incorrect, or unstable conditions demand greater researcher flexibility. Ronnie implemented an experimental study of the impact of a film-editing course on students' spatial visualization abilities. When the pretest measures showed that the control group was already scoring higher than the treatment group, instead of both groups starting out equally, Ronnie responded by making his design more investigative. He included additional data collection points and qualitative impact measures.

Other studies intentionally start as emergent and exploratory and then become increasingly prespecified as background investigations and pilot testing clarify which specific questions are most meaningful, important, and feasible to study. Laura's study of the professional development of medical personnel followed this latter approach. After months of emergent fieldwork and study of prior research, she accumulated sufficient understanding of the important issues and methodological constraints to develop a focused, prespecified design.

The nature of the phenomenon being examined also influences whether a more prespecified or more emergent strategy is the best choice. Suppose you

were interested in knowing more about how different personality types respond to chronic stress. You might choose as your dissertation to conduct a meta-analysis (combining results of comparable studies into a single index) of the considerable empirical literature that relates elevated blood pressure to such personality characteristics as level of affect expression and defensiveness. A prespecified design that summarized the extent of the available literature, specified the criteria for selecting studies for review, and stated the analytic procedures to be used would provide a strong proposal and an efficient work plan. Instead, you might choose to study the psychological and physical effects of prolonged unemployment. In this case, a more emergent design of following selected individuals through extended periods of unemployment might be more revealing. The kinds of data collected would depend, in part, on what the individuals in the study were experiencing.

Note that the prespecified vs. emergent distinction is not synonymous with the common division of qualitative (e.g., interpretivist, naturalistic, ethnographic) vs. quantitative (e.g., behaviorist, postpositivist, experimental, statistical) approaches. Some ethnographic and systematic qualitative studies employ relatively prespecified designs, while some single-subject and investigative quantitative studies use relatively more emergent designs. Although qualitative studies most frequently employ emergent designs and quantitative studies most commonly use prespecified designs, there are numerous examples of the converse.

Functions of the Proposal in Prespecified and Emergent Studies

Proposals function differently between prespecified and emergent studies. Because of greater detail on specific tasks, time lines, and budgets, prespecified proposals are better suited to provide an argument for the anticipated results and to serve as a work plan, as a basis for contractual commitments, and as an evaluative criterion. Proposals for emergent studies allow greater responsiveness to changes in the study context and incremental understanding of the phenomenon of interest. Both types of proposals serve the functions of providing evidence of the student's ability and of soliciting commitment. Differences across prespecified and emergent studies are summarized in Table 2.1 on the next page.

General vs. Local Findings

Some studies emphasize production of findings that generalize beyond the instance and circumstances in which the study was done—generalizable findings. Other studies emphasize the solution of problems in a particular setting—local findings. Let us examine the nature of such studies and implications for functions of the proposal, beginning with those seeking generalizable findings.

TABLE 2.1

A Summary of How the Functions of a Proposal Are the Same and Different for Prespecified and Emergent Studies

Proposal Function	Prespecified Studies	Emergent Studies
Provides an argument for conducting the study.	Yes, fully elaborated argument is expected.	Yes, but argument also emerges as study is completed. Includes as much as is feasible at time of approval (with pilot study, it may be fairly complete).
Describes a work plan.	Yes, usually with detailed timeline, and resource analysis.	Yes, but includes only general purpose, approach, boundaries, rules for proceeding, possible outcomes, and maximum resource expenditure.
Provides evidence of student's ability.	Yes, quality work must be demonstrated.	Yes, quality work must be demonstrated.
Serves as a request for commitment.	Yes, and may also request field entry, data-site approvals, or financial aid.	Yes, and may also request field entry, data-site approvals, or financial aid.
Serves as a contract.	Yes, extensive detail provides strong basis for monitoring work.	No, or only weakly, since only general boundaries and parameters are specified.
Serves as an evaluative criterion.	Yes, for both process and product.	No, or only weakly, since few design details are specified.
Provides partial dissertation draft.	Possibly, if extensive detail provided initially and few subsequent changes made.	No, initial statement is insufficient and subject to considerable change.

Studies Emphasizing Generalizable Findings

Empirical Studies	*Conceptual Studies*
Sample Survey	Philosophical
Experimental	Historical
Case Study	Methodological

What is considered acceptable dissertation inquiry differs by discipline, institution, department, and dissertation committee. In many doctoral programs that prepare researchers to work in academic settings, the dissertation is to be a form of research, resulting in *generalizable* findings. These are findings that apply to (and therefore could be replicated with) other persons, situations or contexts, treatments, observations or measures, study methods or designs, and times. Further, in the social sciences it is often expected that most dissertations will be *empirical,* that is, gathering data from or about persons. They typically employ such methods as sample survey designs; experimental/quasi-experimental designs; longitudinal designs; case study/single-subject designs; qualitative designs; meta-analytic/secondary data analysis designs; and so on.

An example of an empirical study seeking generalizable knowledge was described earlier—Dana's investigation of whether the use of study outlines helps students understand philosophy.

In contrast, some forms of dissertation research employ *conceptual* methods to investigate philosophical, historical, methodological, or theoretical topics, but are still concerned with producing generalizable findings. In these doctoral programs, dissertations are judged according to the established canons of social science or the humanities relevant to each particular domain. Although topics for dissertations of this type are often more abstract and narrowly focused on issues of academic importance, the proposal must still show the student's familiarity with prior research and research method.

David had a full fellowship for the last year of his dissertation, and he spent almost the entire year reading, studying, and writing. He seldom left his apartment except to shop, exercise, and socialize with a few close friends. He met with his dissertation advisor whenever possible. David's dissertation task was to clarify the forms of reasoning that could be used in making evaluative judgments about social and educational programs. In his proposal, he had to convince colleagues in a narrow professional area that his problem had substantial intellectual merit and that he was capable of making a significant contribution to the problem's solution. Although he was seeking generalizable knowledge, few individuals outside this narrow area could judge the importance of the problem or its likely solution (certainly no one in David's family could understand why he chose to spend so much time studying such an arcane issue).

Consider, for the moment, how the faculty viewed these respective proposals of conceptual and empirical research designed to produce generalizable results. Since David was doing conceptual analysis, his proposal had no plan for empirical data collection and only a very modest method statement. His proposal was accepted late in the dissertation process. It consisted primarily of his progress to date, offered as evidence of his ability to work on the problem. Neither David nor the faculty knew how long the study might take or whether an acceptable solution would be found. (By the way, David published a major portion of his research within one year after defending his dissertation!)

Similar to David's work, only a few of Dana's fellow researchers were capable of assessing her arguments based on prior research in cognitive psychology and instructional design. Her ability to conduct her proposed research had already been established, however, through collaborative studies she had done with faculty and her pilot study experience. In reviewing her proposal, her committee members were most concerned with the strength of her study design, the quality of the measurement instruments, and the logistics of actually collecting the data in the field.

Functions of the Proposal in Studies Emphasizing Generalizable Findings

Generalizable findings may be located by both prespecified and emergent studies. The nature of the generalities found by the strategies may differ, however, with those from the prespecified tending to be abstract and more independent of context whereas emergent study findings often are heavily context dependent. Indeed, in emergent studies, the extent of generality is often left to the interpretation of the reader, with descriptions rather than conclusions resulting from the study.

The functions played by the proposal are largely determined by whether it more closely resembles prespecified or emergent. Prespecified empirical studies are usually expected to result in generalizable findings. Experiments and sample surveys have been common approaches, with proposals expected to be fully developed statements serving all the functions described above. In emergent studies, the function of the proposal as argument, work plan, contract, and evaluative criterion is weak or nonexistent. Therefore, the functions of giving evidence of ability and requesting commitment on the part of faculty become more critical.

Studies Emphasizing Local Findings—Application Studies

Development Studies	*Problem-Solving Studies*
Measuring Instruments	Cost Analysis
Curriculum	Evaluation
Software	Diffusion

Many doctoral programs prepare practitioners who are more concerned with the *application* of knowledge in specific contexts. In these programs, the dissertation is often a process of *development* resulting in a needed product with demonstrated effectiveness, such as a measurement instrument, a piece of equipment, a curriculum, computer software, a policy, or a program or intervention. Such studies tend to be prespecified so that all the functions of the proposal are important.

Some application dissertations are explicitly *problem solving* in nature—for example, action-oriented studies, evaluations, need assessments, diffusion studies, and cost analysis studies. Application dissertations may be as broad as the development and testing of a new K–12 mathematics curriculum or as narrow as the evaluation of a local substance abuse program. Application dissertation proposals are expected to emphasize social relevance and utility and the use of existing knowledge to address a practical problem. They must show familiarity with the practical issues involved and give evidence of the student's interpersonal and managerial skills that are often as important as technical and analytic skills in doing such studies.

Functions of the Proposal in Application Studies

Proposals for application studies are likely to emphasize the functions of request for commitment, giving evidence of ability, and describing the evaluative criteria against which the problem solution should be judged.

Philip worked in the human resource development area of a large utility company. His dissertation involved the development and testing of a training intervention designed to encourage employees to take greater responsibility for their own professional development. There was little question of Philip's ability to do the study he proposed, since he had been a corporate trainer for many years and planned to conduct the study in a setting he knew well—the corporation where he currently worked. Further, his study was based on a major theory of adult learning of which his dissertation chairperson was a nationally known proponent.

Much of the dissertation committee's discussion of Philip's proposal concerned the logistical problems of implementing a complex quasi-experimental design in a practical setting. Because Philip planned to conduct his training intervention with corporate employees taking classes offered by a local college, he had to obtain permissions and protection of human subject clearances from his corporation, the local college, as well as his own university. Initial approvals had to be renegotiated when the corporation became concerned about potential employee union objections and possible conflict-of-interest charges arising from the use of corporate resources to conduct personal (dissertation) research. Dealing with such problems took as much of Philip's time as clarifying his arguments that his intervention would indeed ameliorate the existing staff development problem. Clearly, the functions of request for commitment and evidence of relevant abilities were important for Philip's proposal.

Dissertations may be a blend. For example, constructing a measurement instrument or developing an instructional CD-ROM may be each a dissertation in itself or may be parts of a test of an instructional learning theory. Anna's dissertation proposal involved her in a sequence of tasks, including development of instructional materials, evaluation of a training intervention, research on cultural differences, etc.

The prospect of combining the dissertation study with ongoing job responsibilities has appeal, but two half-time jobs often add up to more than one full-time job—pleasing two (or more) masters simultaneously. The dissertation committee may encourage the student in one direction, the job setting in a different one, usually at a faster pace.

> Janeen left the university for a well-paying job at a research corporation that was doing a study very similar to her approved proposal. She continued with only minor changes, but the intellectual ownership of her results had to be renegotiated since the corporation legally owned the work.

You can see why faculty members pay particular attention to matters of field relationships, time lines, and control of the study when reviewing proposals for application dissertations.

Think about which of the various functions your dissertation proposal will be expected to serve. Worksheet 2.1: Proposal Function Review is provided to help you. Also think about the kind of study you might propose (prespecified vs. emergent) and the kind of findings you hope to produce (general vs. local), and then fill in those sections of the worksheet relevant to your plans. Be sure to review prior accepted proposals similar to the studies you are considering and to discuss expectations about the proposal with your chairperson and committee members.

Since the primary function of every dissertation proposal is to justify the proposed study, we next consider in chapter 3 how viewing the proposal as a chain of reasoning facilitates that task, especially for those studies emphasizing generalizable findings.

WORKSHEET 2.1

Proposal Function Review

What Are Expectations for My Proposal?

For the type(s) of study you expect to propose for your dissertation, describe the extent to which your proposal will be expected to serve each of the functions identified. It may be helpful to consult faculty advisors, more senior dissertation students, and prior local dissertation proposals.

To What Extent Will My Proposal Need To . . . ?
Provide an argument for justifying my study?
Include a work plan?
Provide evidence of my ability to do the study?
Serve as a request for commitment to work with me?
Serve as a contract for how my study is to be conducted?
Be used later to judge the quality of my dissertation work?
Serve as a partial draft of my final dissertation report?