Components of a qualitative research proposal

1. Background
   a. The macro environment - the acts, the era, the people

2. Introduction
   a. Focusing into the local environment that this study will deal with, and more detail which sets up the dilemma. We need to know what is happening that causes the need for research to be conducted
   b. Problem statement
      i. The problem statement has four components – see note attached
   c. Purpose statement
      i. What is the purpose of this research
         1. To explore
         2. To analyse
         3. To interrogate
         4. To prove – this is almost impossible to do unless you’re doing hypothesis testing.
         5. To understand
         6. To assess perceptions
         7. To evaluate - be careful, evaluation research is a field all on its own.
   d. Research Questions
      i. Two to three overarching questions that you will ask your respondents and the secondary data, which will assist you in providing the data to meet your purpose
      ii. The research questions may well arise out of the literature review, or else inform the literature that you are looking at.

3. Literature Review
   a. Tell the story of the literature - in the form of the terrain that the literature covers. This should show the reader the themes that emerge from a reading of other researchers in your area. You should have a minimum of 10 journal articles in your reference, at least 7 of which were published in the last 5 years.
      i. You should tell the reader:
         1. where you get the literature from
         2. what literature you have excluded from your review
         3. on what grounds you made the decision to not include a literature at this stage (remember this is a proposal, and you do not have to have read everything yet)
         4. What search strings you used to get the literature
         5. What interesting facts you have noticed in terms of the literature.
      ii. You have to decide how you are going to organise your literature – by themes, by time – before 1994, after 1994, according to remarkable
incidents like wars, economic recessions, from the international to the local (moving from the broad to the narrow)


4. Methodology
   a. The methodology should tell the reader what research paradigm you will choose – this will be quantitative, qualitative, or mixed method. The School strongly recommends that you choose either quants or quals. You can leave your mixed methods approach to your PhD.
   b. You should tell the reader why you have chosen to do the method you have chosen. This should closely relate to the purpose that you have already laid out.
   c. Within the paradigm of research chosen, is there any other way of understanding your research process – is it a case study? Is it discourse analysis? Is it a textual analysis? How does your design work in conjunction with your conceptual framework?
   d. You must tell the reader how you are going to go about getting the primary data:
      i. The sample you will use
         1. The sampling method – (e.g.: random, snowball, purposive)
         2. How you will identify the sample
         3. Why you will use this method of identification
         4. Whether this method has any implications for the validity of the study
         5. How many people will be in your sample – for 50% research you should interview from 10 – 15 people, or do 50 survey questionnaires.
      e. You should discuss the secondary data
         i. What form it will take
         ii. Why the form is important to your study - how does it support you in honing in on your purpose
         iii. What questions will you ask the secondary data, and what will this prove.
         iv. Be specific and discuss your secondary data in detail – in many ways it is as important as the primary data.

5. Data Analysis
   a. You should give the reader an understanding of how you will go about analysing the data you have gathered. In qualitative research, the themes that guide the analysis will most likely arise from the data itself. However, you can make an ‘educated guess’ at the proposal stage as to what these themes are likely to be from the literature review that you have completed
      i. Is it informed by the themes that have come out of the literature
      ii. Is it informed by an academic model that you are using to understand the data?
iii. Is it informed by the themes that appear from the data itself (grounded theory)

6. And from here you will move to how you will complete the research proposal by providing a detailed plan of action for your research (research management) and the reference section.

For a fuller discussion on the problem statement, see below:

**The Problem Statement.**

*This is closely sourced from Badenhorst, C. 2007. Research Writing: Breaking the Barriers. Van Schaik. Pretoria. pp 19 - 20*

The problem statement is made up of a series of statements designed to provide:

1. A **description** of the issue that you are looking at.
2. A **position** for the issue within the existing literature
3. A **context** for the issue. The place, the time, the people, the institution, the combatants.
4. An understanding for the reader as to **Why** would it be interesting to do this particular piece of research? In the context of what is already available in term of existing research or in the context of documented knowledge.

Together these statements provide a paragraph for your research that quickly gives the reader a clear understanding of the key issues that apply to your work. Once the reader has gone through the problem statement, you have provided a foundation for what comes next. You have sketched out the environment, and now you can begin to fill in the detail.

Lets look at the components of the problem statement in some detail:

**A statement of the problem.**

One or two sentences

What is the problem that you are looking at? It is a stand alone simple sentence that tells us what you’re looking at.

For instance:

"Ex combatants find it difficult to re-integrate into mainstream society."

**A couple of sentences that identify the knowledge gap**

The knowledge gap is critical to the concept of the generation of new knowledge. All research builds on work that has been done before. In order to support your argument, and
write with authority, you have to acknowledge the work of the thinkers that have come before you.

You have to position your work in the context of the previous knowledge. Some of the writers will have been writing from other country perspectives, looking at different populations. How does your work compare with theirs? Do you agree with them, or do you think that their work misses out on a critical issue in the particular conditions that apply to the what you’re writing about?

For example:

Much work has been done which focuses on the patterns of behaviour and identity constructs of combatants themselves, and how this impacts on their ability to re-integrate with society. Little has been done to look at the attitudes of the members of the communities which the ex combatants wish to integrate into.

The context of the study

One or two sentences that places the work in a geographical, time, cultural or political space. By including this you ground what you’re writing about and you give the reader a conceptual frame for your work.

Beginning in 2005, a steady inflow of Zimbabwean immigrants settling in Sandberg in the Northern Province resulted by 2008, in 20% of the community being illegal immigrants. Half of the adult male immigrants were in the Zimbabwean armed forces before coming to South Africa, and have not developed a skill outside of the military. This has led to a relative difficulty in their being able to integrate with the community where they live.

Why is this interesting?

Why should your project get done? You need to persuade the reader that you are writing about an important issue, and that they should read further. In order to do this, you need to show that you have done your homework, and are basing your work on sound foundations that have gone before. Thus you will talk about the people that have written before, the policy environment that is impacted, and how your work progresses on this foundation.

The May 2008 xenophobic attacks which rocked South Africa has laid the foundation for a broad academic response which has sought to understand the causes that resulted in the attacks, and the effects of the attacks on vulnerable immigrants living in South Africa (See Cairns 2008, Cairns 2009a Cairns 2009b). While this research builds our understanding from the perspectives of foreign victims, this work looks at a particular community within the broad ‘illegal immigrant’ grouping, who because of their work background are comparatively disadvantaged in terms of entry into economic activity within the host community.

¹This and the following examples are made up for the purposes of this handout.