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## **GUIDELINES FOR A RESEARCH PROPOSAL FOR A RESEARCH STUDY**

In [CTPDC's Diploma in Counselling course](#) the research proposal is an assessed 2,000-word assignment. It should include the following:

1. Introduction (including a brief outline of the structure of your research proposal)
2. The theoretical framework you intend to use (including references to the key literature)
3. Your hypotheses
4. Outline your research methodology.
5. How you intend to analyse the data you gain
6. Ethical issues
7. Contingencies, timetable
7. Conclusions
8. Draft questionnaire or interview schedule (if appropriate)
9. Bibliography.

## Step-by-step guide to writing a research study

1. Set your topic
  - a. Is it too broad? – reject (E.g. ‘The effects of birth on the mother’. In this everything is abstract: mother (first time, second, many times mother, young, old, middle aged, town dweller, country woman, working class, peasant, upper class), birth (easy, difficult, Ceasarian, twin), effects (physical, emotional, long-term, short-term, imagined, real).
  - b. Is it too narrow? – reject (E.g. ‘Stress effects caused by new working practices at X.Y. & Co. on Smithdown Road’. You need to acquire a lot of skills to be able to extrapolate from a single case study, and you probably do not have these skills. In addition, because of the limitations imposed on the research study assignment, there is a good chance that your research study report will be much too descriptive.)
  - c. Can it be researched? – if not, reject (E.g. ‘Post-traumatic stress in Merseyside Police Force’. While it is an excellent subject, it is very unlikely that you would have the access to the necessary data and people. For example, police has its own list of counsellors).
2. Why did you choose this topic?
  - a. It should be brief and convincing.
3. A brief summary (about 200 words) of the research
  - a. Avoid stereotype statements, e.g. ‘The nation is built on the rock of the family, thus the psychological health of the family is crucially important.’ If you think it over, while a lot of people believe in this statement (and politicians abuse this belief), the statement is fairly tautological and not true at all.
4. What outcome do you expect from your research?
  - a. If you have absolutely no idea, you should not do it. Heuristic research is not appropriate for research study on a diploma in counselling course.
5. What do you know of the research
  - a. Any theory should come here
  - b. If there is only one theory – your research should test its validity on the topic or explore the limitations of this theory in different contexts.
  - c. If there are more than one theory – your research should be able to demonstrate the implications of these theories
  - d. If there is no theory on the topic – you should discard the topic, because the research study assignment on a diploma in counselling course is not appropriate for creating a theoretical framework.

6. Draw up the factors you expect to affect your research topic
  - a. List these factors and explain them (these should be very concrete, i.e. ‘emotions’ are not good enough, you need to put the types of emotions)
  - b. Show what value these factors could have (e.g. high, low, medium, strong, weak, etc.). You have to be able to demonstrate that the factors can have these values. If your factors are too abstract, you will not be able to do so.
  - c. Explain why do you think these factors are sufficient to analyse the topics (i.e. you create a model – so it should say: these factors explain the topic, the factors are expected to behave like this, different combinations of these factors (and their values) create different results in your topic).
  - d. What are the consequences of these different results?
7. What information do you need to verify the behaviour of the factors that you identified?
8. How can you obtain this information (e.g. questionnaire, interview, observation)
9. What is your timetable? Do you expect any trouble (e.g. access problems) and how do you want to deal with it?
10. Does the cost of the research cause any problem and if yes, how do you want to deal with it?

All in all, a research proposal has a clear flow of thoughts, starting from the broadest issue (the topic), through your questions and your model (hypotheses) to the implementation. If you cannot set this clear logic, there is a problem with your research proposal. The most likely candidates of the cause of the problem are: the topic and the hypotheses.

