

COM 200: Research Project Two: Quantitative Research Proposal

This document provides the basics of the assignment. For a more interactive discussion of each element, please visit my website and launch the PowerPoint tutorial.

Assignment Abstract

Demonstrate your mastery of quantitative research design by drafting a research proposal that includes a review of relevant scholarly and trade literature and a proposal of either a survey or experiment. At least one variable in your study must be a communication variable. You can propose a scholarly study similar to those in our journals or an applied study such as might be done for a specific organization (profit or not-for-profit).

Point Value: 100	Page Range of Body: 7-10 (appendix, etc. are extra)	Minimum Sources: 15 overall with at least 8 in Lit Review.
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Goals: There are four main goals for this project.

- To gain competency in basics of quantitative communication research.
- To understand the value of secondary research within quantitative research.
- To gain competency in APA style and formal academic writing.
- To “put it all together” regarding the skills and concepts we’ve learned this semester.

Core Skills: While every coreskill is fostered through each assignment here are some keys.

- Intellectual curiosity: you will need to demonstrate curiosity about issues and methods.
- Collaboration: the group will need to work effectively to plan and carry out the project.
- Critical thinking: this will be needed not only to figure out what needs to be done but also what you have found out through your proposed study that goes beyond common sense.
- Praxis: you must put the concepts in our text into practice and adequately reflect on that process.

Key Steps: Remember that for you must know the four Ps: paradigm, purpose, process, and product. For each method the basic process can be understood in four stages: *preparation, engagement, reflection and analysis, and expression*. Below is a brief discussion of how those steps apply to this assignment. At some point during steps 2-6 of preparation you’ll meet with me for a conference. Integrate that feedback into your research design.

Preparation

1. Meet as a group and share your interests in topics that have emerged from other COM classes or your professional or personal interests that might be catalysts for this project.
2. Determine a topic and discuss for basic agreement about key issues, possible RQs & potential variables.
3. Conduct secondary research to further understand and refine your overall research questions, the variables and ways you might operationalize each variable.
4. Use this research to establish significance of your topic, create the literature review and help identify the “gap” in our knowledge that requires your proposed study.

5. Make explicit use of secondary research to inform **every** section of your proposal.
6. Use our text, SkillPort resources and literature you encountered to draft the design of your project and be sure it is understood by all members of your group.
7. You must use at least one published scale/measure in your study. Consult Communication Research Measures: A Sourcebook or Communication Research Measures II: A Sourcebook. They are on reserve in the Library. Your scales/measures do not have to come from these sources but they are available if you do not find scales/measures through other means. Be sure to CITE your scales/measures!
8. Delegate initial draft responsibilities for various sections of the proposal: introduction, literature review, method section, Appendix A (instrument) and references. You won't be able to write the reflection section until later.
9. Draft sections and then engage in peer reviews/revisions. Consider taking a close to final draft to the Writing Center and even trading with another group for additional feedback.

Engagement

1. Since this is a *proposal* and not an actual study, you will not actually distribute and collect questionnaires, etc. But obviously this is where such steps would be located: distributing questionnaires, getting them back, etc. Or carrying out the experiment designed in the preparation phase.
2. That said, you *could* decide to print out a few of your questionnaires and hand them to classmates to see if directions are clear and see if you are getting back data that would *really answer* your RQ if you distributed your questionnaire to a larger sample.

Reflection and Analysis

1. Again, we are limited because this is a proposal not a full study. In this stage we would carry out computation and statistical procedures that are discussed in your proposal.
2. Your proposal **MUST** make it clear how you *would* process such data. What statistics would you run for each question of your instrument? Would you compare male and female scores? Old and young scores? White and non-white scores, etc. Also, scores on what? All questions? Questions 2-9? Be clear.
3. In a completed study we would also see some interpretation or discussion of these numbers after they are reported. What inferences or evaluative claims can we make with this data as support for such claims?

Expression (Product)

1. Draft and revise an essay that follows the basic outline below.
2. This essay should instill confidence in your reader that the proposed study is needed, important, and methodologically sound and would yield valid, reliable and useful results.
3. Make sure the draft is error free in both form and substance and makes every effort to adhere to APA style.
4. Review essay through the lens of the grading rubric. The essay should meet all the explicit criteria expressed in that rubric as well as meet a holistic sense of excellence.

I'm not a very good writer, but I'm an excellent rewriter. ~James Michener

Easy reading is damn hard writing. ~Nathaniel Hawthorne

Key Resources

- The grading rubric: it offers clear sense of obligations, priorities and standards. If you don't understand any part of it, ask questions!
- Our textbook: Can you connect the dots between what you are reading and what you are doing? Our APA Style Guide: Don't just look up how to cite stuff in the reference section. It shows how to cite within the body and discusses formal writing in general.
- SkillPort has several GOOD resources on quantitative methods including how to conduct a survey in a corporate setting and *Statistics for Dummies* to help clarify the definitions and uses of many of the terms in our textbook. Be sure to cite them if you use them!
- Communication Research Measures: A Sourcebook or Communication Research Measures II: A Sourcebook. They are on reserve in the Library.

Common Mistakes and how to avoid them

Mistake	How to avoid it
Procrastinating or fear while searching for the "perfect" topic.	Almost every topic is hard in some way. Don't spend too much time looking for the "perfect" topic. Keep the proposed study simple without making it trivial. Spend more time <i>making</i> it a good topic for an excellent <i>write up</i> . Use past studies to help.
Poor use of secondary research.	The secondary research should help you DO things within the essay. Use it to establish significance and the gap in our knowledge. Use it to define variables and justify research design choices.
Under developed discussion of data analysis.	For many groups the hardest part to talk about is how the statistics would be used to "crunch" the data and develop findings. Consider drawing out tables, etc. and look closely at your scales/measures as you reason through these issues.
Writing in an overly formal and stiff style.	Academic writing is formal in vocabulary and grammar but need not be stiff and should certainly not be inefficient. Use first person when <i>needed</i> . Just don't overdo it.
Underdeveloped reflection section.	This really does matter. For you to begin to master research processes you must reflect on how it went and what you learned. Further you must connect those insights with the

You MUST work hard on your Methods section of your proposal! Look at journal articles, read the recommended text: Writing Empirical Reports. Make sure that your reader could "do" your study based on the methods section!



Basic Outline and Expectations

What follows is the basic outline for the major sections of the research project. In the parentheses are guidelines from our optional text, *Writing Empirical Reports 5th ed.* that address each section. Understand that mere “filling in the blanks” won’t result in a satisfactory research project. You must demonstrate hard won insights and write with excellence. Wording of headings can vary slightly but basic flow should be consistent with the outline below.

“Communication research studies from the discovery paradigm that make use of some form of statistical analysis typical emphasize the methodologies . . . [of] survey research, experiments and content analysis. Statistical analysis is defined as ‘the science of describing and reasoning from numerical data’ (Smith, 1988, p. 93). Studies that use statistical analysis share many assumptions about the types of claims you can make, the nature of the data, and how that data can be warranted” (Merrigan and Huston, 2009, p. 164)

Title Page (5.1, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7) <page break>

Title of Paper

Introduction (**no subheading needed**) that establishes the basic topic and importance of that topic. (6.3, 6.4). A good research project will typically cite 1-3 sources here. It should be about 1 page.

Review of Literature

This section should offer a coherent discussion of previous research on the topic and specific variables of the study. (6.1, 6.6, 6.8, 6.9, 6.11, 6.12, 6.20). This section should have an introductory sentence or two (see 6.1) and then clear use of subheadings (1.5). At the end of the literature review the “gap” in our knowledge should be clear and you then transition nicely to the next section. **MINIMUM SOURCES FOR THE LITERATURE REVIEW** is 8 sources. This means that you might reasonably incorporate some sources in the introduction or conclusion that are not appropriate for the literature review. This might include some internet sites, popular journalistic sources such as *USA Today* or *TIME*.

Purpose of Study

This section should present your research questions and/or your hypotheses (4.4, 4.6, 4.7, 3.3, 3.5, 3.6). After a sentence or two of connection with literature review present your RQs and hypotheses (if necessary) very clearly in a format like this (you’ll likely have more than one of each):

RQ1: Do students who use the supplemental texts score higher than those who don’t?

H1: Students who actively use supplemental texts will score higher than those who choose not to use such resources.

Method

Brief introductory section that establishes appropriateness of the method (cite 1-3 sources).

Participants

Describe sample and sampling procedure (9.3, 9.5, 9.6)

Instrumentation

Describe the instrument efficiently (that means using course vocabulary) but in sufficient detail that the reader can picture it. Refer the reader to appendix A to see the actual instrument. (9.9, 9.10, 9.12)

Data Analysis

Since we won't have results, this section will be used to tell your reader the statistical procedures you *would* use once the data was collected. Even though you won't have data, some of the guidelines still apply (10.1, 10.2, 10.4). Some teams have found it useful to create the tables they would use to present their data as a way of working out their thought process. In that case, put such tables in Appendix B.

Conclusion

For our purposes, the conclusion will combine some things that are traditionally in a formal report and some things I need for a college course experience. I'll want a very short summary (11.1) and some discussion of weaknesses and likely implications of study (11.5, 11.7, 11.8). Then I need your team to offer some honest insightful discussion of what you all learned about quantitative research and methods in general from this research project. <page break>

References

Prepare complete list of every source actually cited in your proposal. Every guideline in chapter 14 is important. <page break>

Appendix A

Offer a brief description of what will follow. This is almost like a title page and abstract for what will follow as the body of the appendix. <page break>

Present instrument as it would actually be handed out to participants. <page break>

GRADING RUBRIC SIGNED BY EVERY MEMBER OF YOUR GROUP.

THE LAST PAGE is your final PEER EVALUATION memo that should be filled out like previous reviews: use memo format, use first and last names, give whole number scores consistent with performance and provide 2-3 sentences of rationale for each score.

Do not forget to explore the resources on how to do research that are on . . .

