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Some guidelines on preparing a post-graduate research proposal in the Social Sciences

1. State the hypothesis or question as clearly as possible.
2. State the reason why you are interested in investigating this hypothesis or question.
3. This will include stating personal reasons and theoretical reasons.
4. Explain the theoretical framework within which you will situate the hypothesis or question.
5. Provide some samples (short) of previous research on this topic. This will give an indication of how familiar you are with some of the literature. It is not expected that you will have full grasp of the literature review, simply provide a 'taste', choosing what will support your proposal.
6. State how your research will add to the present state of knowledge about the topic.
7. Under the heading of Methodology state methods you intend using, or rather the most appropriate method to investigate your problem. This might mean a purely quantitative approach or a combination of quantitative with qualitative. It may mean a representative sample of a particular group, or a selected sample where the method might be by in-depth interview or so on. It is good to mention the probable sample, the time-frame, whether the analysis of data will be comparative or whatever. You will probably have to change the methodology somewhat when you actually get going on the research so it is sufficient to reassure the reader/ assessor that you have thought seriously about how to best measure your hypothesis. Show an awareness of difficulties you might fore-see with the methodology, for example, if it involves 'observation' or in-depth interviews, discuss a little, the 'observer' effect. If it is purely a survey then acknowledge the disadvantages of using this method and perhaps let the reader know that you are considering how to overcome these disadvantages and so on.
8. When setting out a time-frame give a notion of the length of time you expect to spend reading the literature review, when you think you might commence the field research, how long after that it might take to write up the findings and so on.
9. Part-time it usually takes 4-5 years. Full-time it may only take three years but, in the arts and social sciences it usually takes longer.
10. It is a massive undertaking !! You need to be very enthusiastic about your topic.