

WRITING THE SOCIAL SCIENCES DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

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Contents

- Introduction
- Conceptualization
- Structure of the Proposal
- The Proposal Writing Process
 - Key components
 - Research Problem & Questions
 - Literature Review
 - Methods
 - Managing the Project
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 - Time Management
 - The Committee
- Resources



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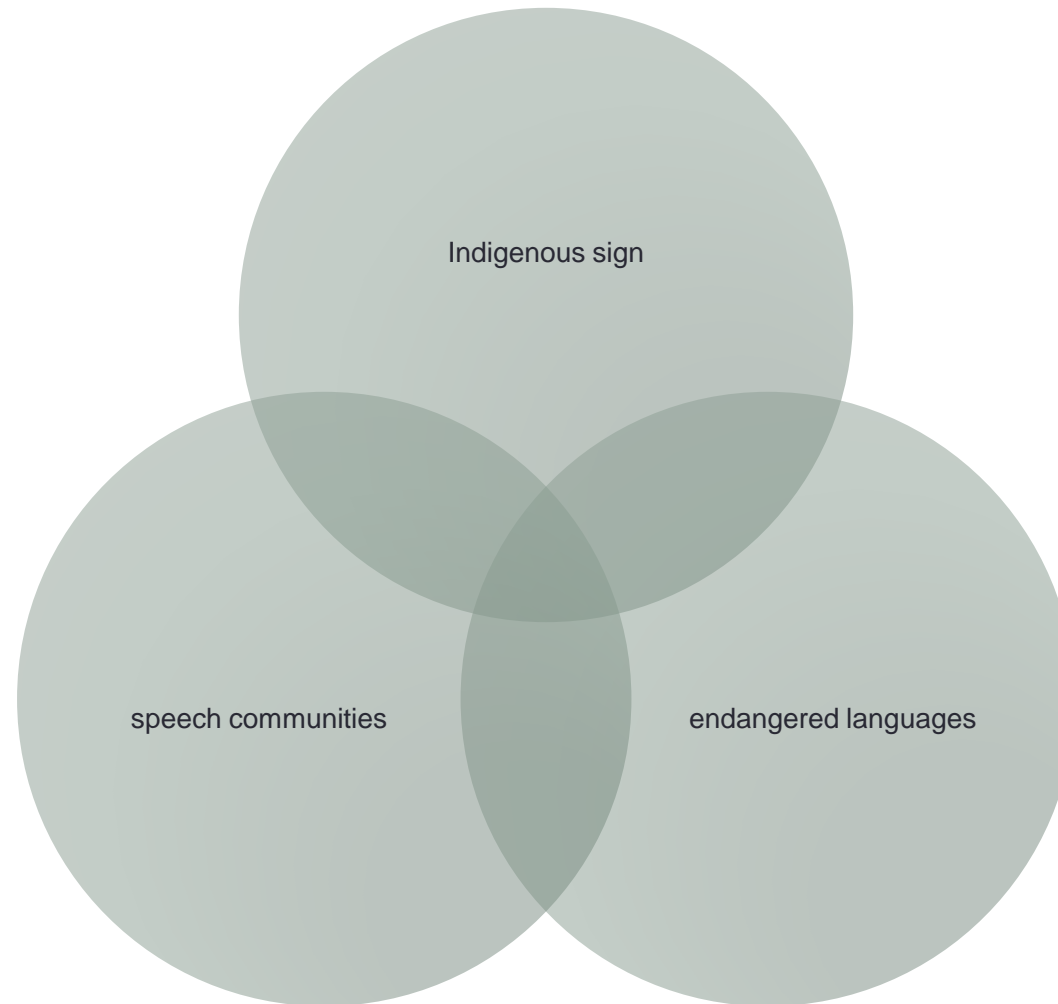
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Ban Khor is a village in Thailand with an unusually large deaf population. In response to the high incidence of deafness, villagers spontaneously created *pasa kidd*, the "language of the mute," or Ban Khor Sign Language (BKSL). BKSL is a language isolate that arose approximately 70 years ago, and since then use of BKSL has spread rapidly among both hearing and deaf villagers, facilitating successful socio-communicative management of deafness in the community. While rare, this sociolinguistic response to widespread hereditary deafness is not unique to Ban Khor. Indigenous sign languages have developed elsewhere around the world. A lack of comparative typological linguistic description notwithstanding, sociolinguistic context and function distinguish this sign language variety, which correlates with a special kind of speech community—a 'speech/sign community.' The latter share all essential characteristics of the former, but speech/sign communities' distinctive dimension of 'moral *habitus*' necessitates rethinking of the core linguistic anthropological notion of the 'speech community.' Indigenous sign languages and speech/sign communities underscore the true linguistic (signed as well as spoken) and cultural (Deaf as well as hearing) diversity in the world today. Yet indigenous sign languages are among the world's most endangered languages. Their highly compressed life cycles lend urgency to and pose challenges for documentation, description, preservation, and revitalization of these special language communities. This dissertation has four inter-related objectives. One is to analyze the dynamic process of indigenous sign language emergence in relation to material, ecological, biological, demographic, ideological, and interactional dimensions in Ban Khor. A second objective is to provide preliminary description of select features of Ban Khor Sign Language, including: identification of both unmarked universal handshapes and rare phonological forms; analysis of personal names, place terminology, and color terms; description of the interrogative system; and inventory of various linguistic genres and registers. The third goal is to refine the notion of the speech community to include speech/sign communities. Finally, this study demonstrates how traditional anthropological methods can be combined to develop a foundational description of a previously undocumented speech/sign community, including delineation of its geo-areal boundaries and estimation of its size and membership.



Conceptualizing the Project



Exercise:

Try making your own Venn diagram, based *either* on what you think your research problem/question is *or* on the bodies of literature you feel are most relevant to your research.



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Proposal Components

- Title
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Aims/Hypotheses
- Review of Literature
- (Statement of the Problem/RQ)
- (Theoretical/Conceptual Framework)
- Methods
- (Preliminary Results)
- (Significance/Implications)
- Timeline
- References



Proposal Components

- Do not write in this order!
- The introduction / abstract trap: DO NOT start here
 - The beginning of the proposal
 - Not the beginning of the writing process
- Some sections will not appear as separate sections (see parentheses).
- There are other possibilities (e.g., appendices) not in the handbook:
 - survey instruments, IRB approvals, important figures, etc.



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The Proposal Writing Process

Research Problem/Question(s)

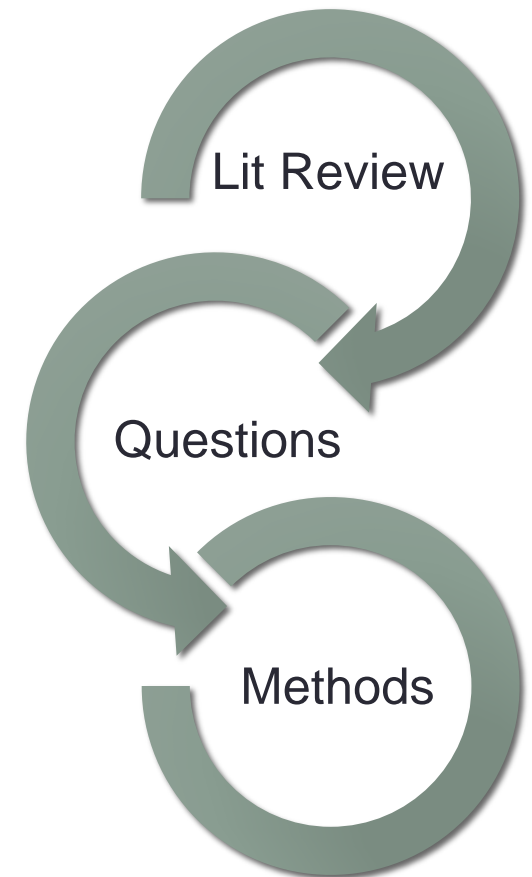
- Interrelated
- Address related aspects of one overarching question

Literature

- Each body of literature is directly tied to a specific question

Methods

- Linked to the specific questions they will answer
- Justified by the demands of the question(s)



The Proposal Writing Process

Research Problem/Question(s)

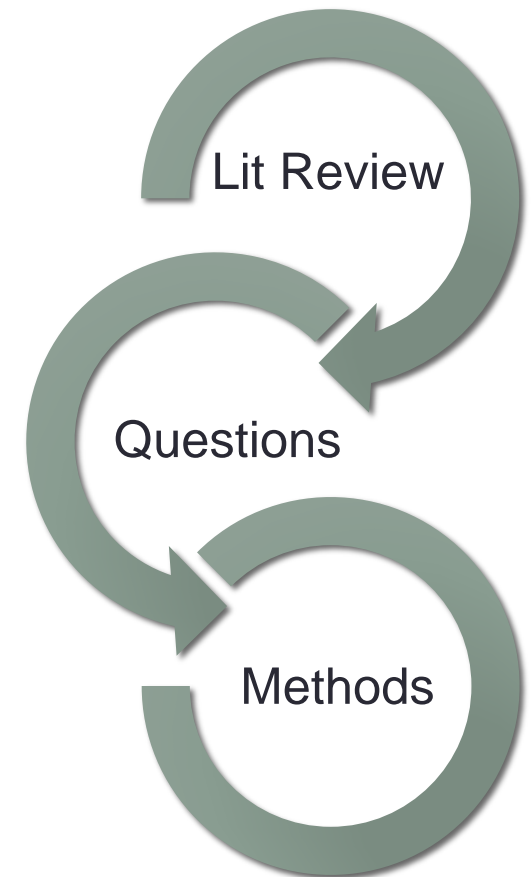
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Research Problem & Questions

Topics

- Electoral politics, ballot access, political party influence

(Initial) Question

- What role does ballot access play in electoral politics?



Research Problem & Questions: Sample Problem

In countries where electoral rules encourage candidates to develop a "personal vote," parties are generally assumed to be fairly weak (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987; Carey and Shugart 1995). However, parties often have non-obvious ways of influencing the political process, even in ostensibly candidate-centered systems. These include formal or informal control over "ballot access" [...] as well as the ability to co-opt the means of cultivating a personal vote through controlling reputation-building resources. The purpose of this dissertation is to highlight and measure the role that control over ballot access, the least-studied aspect of Carey and Shugart's theory, contributes to electoral politics. Few would dispute the theoretical importance of ballot access, but nominations, candidate selection, and party list ranking procedures are often a matter of internal (often informal) party policy, and are therefore more difficult to study and to quantify. Hence, the nature and extent of their importance is less well-understood than more easily-quantified variables such as whether or not votes are pooled or district magnitude.



RQ Exercise

- Take a few minutes to write your topics as you are currently conceiving them and then a question that focuses the topic.
- Can you subdivide, or further articulate, one of the key concepts in your question into additional questions? You'll come back to these in the methods section.



Literature Review

Goals:

1. To demonstrate your knowledge regarding research that speaks to your particular research interests
2. To show how your research question(s) pertain to or address important questions being raised in your field; to demonstrate how your research can build on or advance current knowledge.
3. To explain how you will go about acquiring and data you need to address your questions.



Literature Review

Social sciences specifics:

- Literature review is usually a designated section towards the beginning of a piece (course paper or journal article)
- It is also usually a separate section or chapter within a dissertation proposal or dissertation
- Follow the conventions of journals in your field, or look at example dissertations to see norms
- Sometimes you might write a stand-alone lit review paper for a course, which could focus on a research gap but might be more of an assessment of current scholarship
- Literature reviews can vary according to the methods and the research design



Methods

- Qualitative

- Greater emphasis on *data collection* procedures.
- If collecting your own data, you must provide a thorough explanation of what information you will gather and how.
- Analyses often emerge *after* data collection has commenced.

- Quantitative

- Greater emphasis on plans for *data analysis*.
- If analyzing a pre- existing dataset, it may be sufficient to cite publications that document its initial construction.
- Your explanation of the statistical techniques and other analyses you plan to apply to the data will comprise the core of your methods.



Methods

- Talk to your committee about the level of detail they expect
- Discuss data collection sampling, procedures, instruments, etc.
 - Ethnographers may also describe their participants, field site, relationship to community
- Describe plans for data analysis (esp. quant folks)
 - Include any software, coding techniques, etc.
- Try to anticipate questions committee might have



Preliminary Analysis

- Can be included in Methods, or stand alone
- Can help to persuade your committee that you know what you're doing



Methods

- Preliminary analysis: Can demonstrate that you have a clear plan that is feasible



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References

- Use citation management software
 - Zotero, Endnote, Mendeley, etc.
 - Some free, others have student pricing
- Group references by theme



Time Management

- Find out when (and where) you work best
- PROTECT YOUR TIME!



Time Management

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- PROTECT YOUR TIME!
- Investigate apps and other tools to increase productivity (e.g., Tomighty, Trello, etc.) – but don't spend too much time on this!
- Don't get bogged down in the literature
- Divide the project into manageable pieces
- Experiment with all kinds of writing, including freewriting and outlines – messy is good!



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- Don't get bogged down in the literature
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- Experiment with all kinds of writing, including freewriting and outlines – messy is good!
- *Write regularly* – even 15 minutes a day of writing will keep you actively thinking about and working on your research



The Committee

- Communicate early and frequently with your committee (or at least those in your committee who are most helpful and available!)
 - Consider establishing a meeting schedule to help you both stick to your progress
- Attend labs, seminars, etc. with your committee members



The Committee

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 - Consider establishing a meeting schedule to help you both stick to your progress
- Attend labs, seminars, etc. with your committee members
- Talk to students who had the same committee members about their experiences at this stage and later
- Discuss drafting and deadlines with committee members (esp. your chair)



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Resources

- Books on academic writing
 - Bolker: Writing Your Dissertation in 15 Minutes a Day
 - Maxwell: Qualitative Research Design
 - Creswell: Research Design
- GWC Website (Resources section): gwc.gsrc.ucla.edu/Resources
- Make individual appointments with Graduate Writing Center consultants
- Attend workshops at the GWC
- Dissertation Proposal Bootcamp

