How to Write a Good Proposal

Writing a good proposal is not easy and takes some time. However, once you have devised a clean proposal around a good research question, completing your final thesis will be relatively easy because you will know what needs to be done.

Below, you will find a list of question, going through which you will gather all the information necessary to write a good proposal. Put differently, to write a final thesis that is successful from an academic (and also from a practical perspective), you will need to answer these questions. You can then translate the answers into a proposal which should follow the structure below. You should write about one paragraph per item, but no more than two pages, 12pt Times New Roman (or another "standard" font), single-space:

Title >> Question 3.7

Principal Topic
Paragraph 1: Theoretical background—answers questions 1.4, 1.5
Paragraph 2: Specific conversation—answers question 2.1 *(Make sure to explain what current literature can say about your question!)*
Paragraph 3: Research gap & question—answers questions 2.2, 2.3

Method
Make sure you know the answer to question 1.3!
Paragraph 4: Research design & population —answers questions 3.1, 3.3
Paragraph 5: Sample, methods & variables—answers question 3.2 *(Make sure you know the answer to question 3.5!)*

Results and Implications
Paragraph 6: Theoretical implications—how do you think answering 2.2/2.3 will impact 2.1, conditional upon your answer to question 3.4?
Paragraph 7: Practical implications—how do you think answering 2.2/2.3 will impact 1.2/3.6?

Step 1: Identifying your conversation

1.1 Name a problem or question that you find interesting and that you consider suitable as a starting point for your thesis.

1.2 Why is this question interesting to you? What would the answer to it allow you to do?

1.3 What exactly is it that you want to study, i.e., what is your unit of analysis?
E.g., decision-making in people's heads, a process over time, the influence of variables on firm or industry performance, etc.

1.4 Which theoretical perspective could you use to start tackling this question?
E.g., which of the theoretical frameworks (from the field of business administration) that you learned about in class or before seems most applicable? Try to name the perspective and state in 1-2 sentences what it is about (What does it describe? When/why is it useful?).

1.5 Who are the original authors of this perspective? What are the core references?
Try to provide 3-5 (not more, not less) academic references.

Step 2: Finding a new, interesting, and relevant research question

2.1 In the above-mentioned theoretical perspective, who do you want to talk to?
Try to provide 3-5 academic references (not more, not less). These authors/papers should be (a) extensions of the theory identified above, (b) somehow related to the unit of analysis you want to study (see above), (c) representative of the state-of-the-art (i.e., make sure that no more current papers exist that are more suitable to your problem), and (d) ideally, high-quality (e.g., from a high-quality academic journal).

2.2 How would you phrase your question so that it is new, interesting, and relevant to the authors/papers you want to talk to?
Only state the question here but make sure that question 1.3 is taken into account.

2.3 What makes this question to the identified conversation partners (or even to the theoretical perspective at large):
• **new?** (nobody has done it before)
• **interesting?** (it is not trivial, your academic conversation partners should not be able to come up with an answer immediately)
• **relevant?** (the question should matter to those academics)

Step 3: Getting started—next steps

3.1 Generally, what type of research method do you think is appropriate for your research question? Why?
The 'what' is one word (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, experimental, or conceptual) then the why (*keep question 1.3 in mind, throughout!*)

3.2 How would you go about starting your thesis? What is the first thing you did/would need to do?

3.3 If you plan to collect data, what sort of data do you need? How would you get it?

3.4 What would you need to do to be able to show that you have exhaustively answered your question?
Here, 'exhaustively' means that (a) the answer you provide to your question, by itself, makes sense, and (b) you can rule out that alternative explanations exist that would be just as good as your answer, or even better.

3.5 Are there any problems that you would expect?
• In gathering your data
• In analyzing your data
• In answering your question (exhaustively)

3.6 How can you ensure that the answer to the academic research question really helps you?

3.7 What would be a nice, succinct title for your thesis?