



Writing a Research Proposal

Undergraduate Research Hub



What is a research proposal?

- Outlines (in narrative form) the plans for your research project

Why write a research proposal?

- To plan your research study, convey it to others
- To apply for funding for your research
- To request approval for your research from an IRB



Basic Elements of a Research Proposal

Abbreviated versions of:

- Introduction
- Literature review
- Methodology
- Theoretical framework
- Preliminary list of references



Ask your faculty mentor for guidance.



Introduction

Purpose

- to place your study in the context of ongoing research

Consider

- How does it fit into a broader investigative process?
- What are you contributing to the existing body of knowledge?



Ask your faculty mentor about whether your literature review should be incorporated into the introduction or whether it should be a separate section.



Introduction

1. the central issue(s)
2. key concepts / terms
3. the specific research question or problem you're trying to discover or investigate
4. the purpose/goal of your research
 - e.g. test a hypothesis, fill a knowledge gap, explore patterns/inconsistencies
5. the significance
 - why does this matter; why should we care?
 - what makes this worth investigating?
 - what are the consequences of complete/incomplete knowledge?
6. Investigative approach (methods)
7. Situate your study within the context of scholarly research
 - Briefly highlight key previous findings relevant to your study
 - Lead into your literature survey



This can take a few paragraphs.

Literature Review

Purpose

- Places your study in the context of previous work
- Establishes your credibility
 - Show your awareness of relevant research
 - Indicate that you are basing your work on previous work that has received the approval of your academic peers
- Shows how your work relates to and/or differs from previous studies
- Recognizes the work of other scholars



Literature Review (cont.)

In the literature review

- Give a coherent overview of existing research (narrative, not many summaries)
- Trace a trajectory (key discoveries and/or new directions)
- Include the most significant / relevant sources
 - most frequently-cited studies
 - groundbreaking studies that set the direction for later research
- Highlight controversies or debates, fairly presenting alternative perspectives.



Literature Review (cont.)

- Take note of gaps, ambiguities, or questions that still need to be addressed.
- Prepare your reader to recognize your position within the research community: how are you intervening in the scholarly conversation?
- What sources? Relevancy, ask mentor, repeated citations, etc.
- How many references? ~5-10



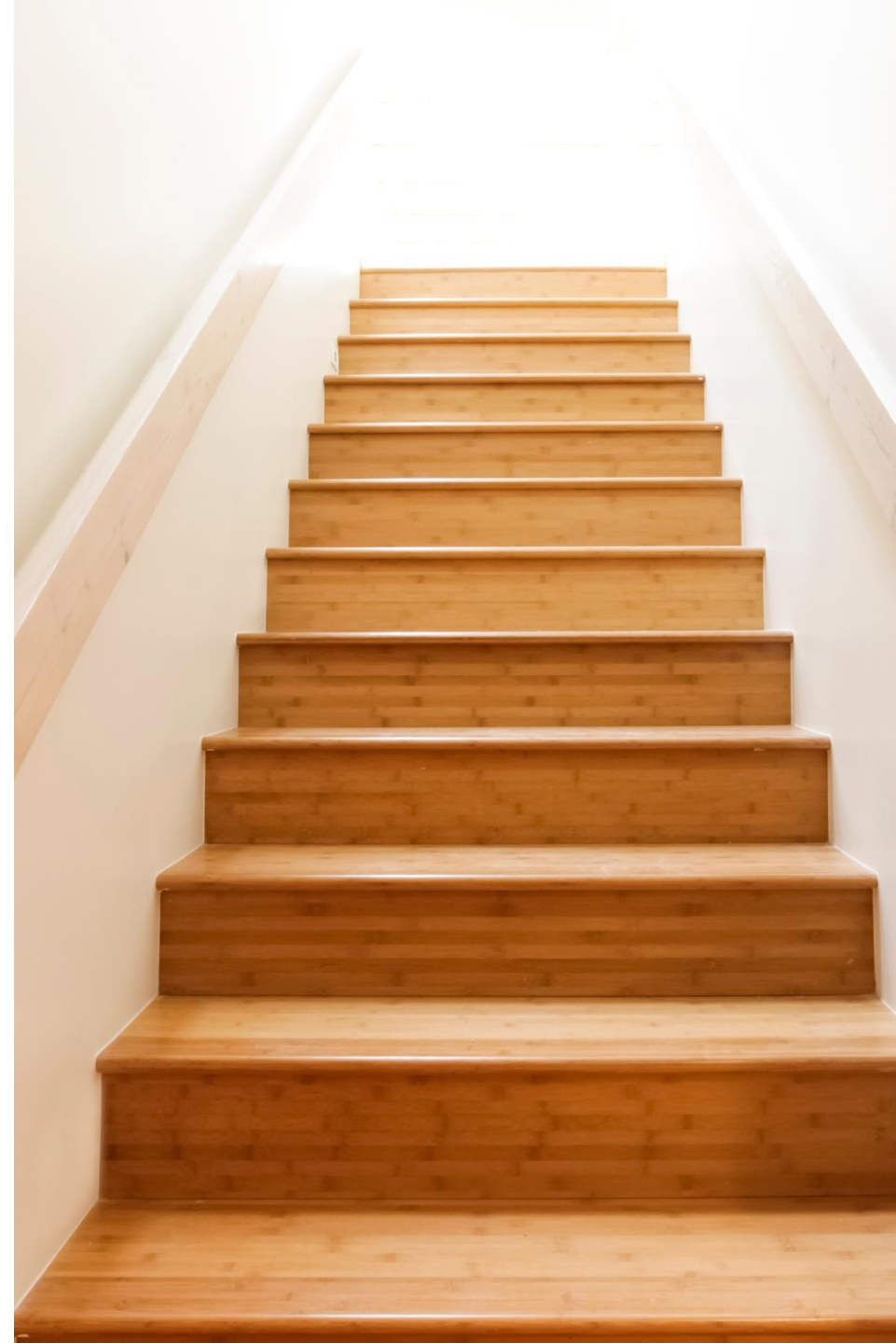
Methodology / Theoretical Framework

Purpose

- Explain the process of your investigation

General

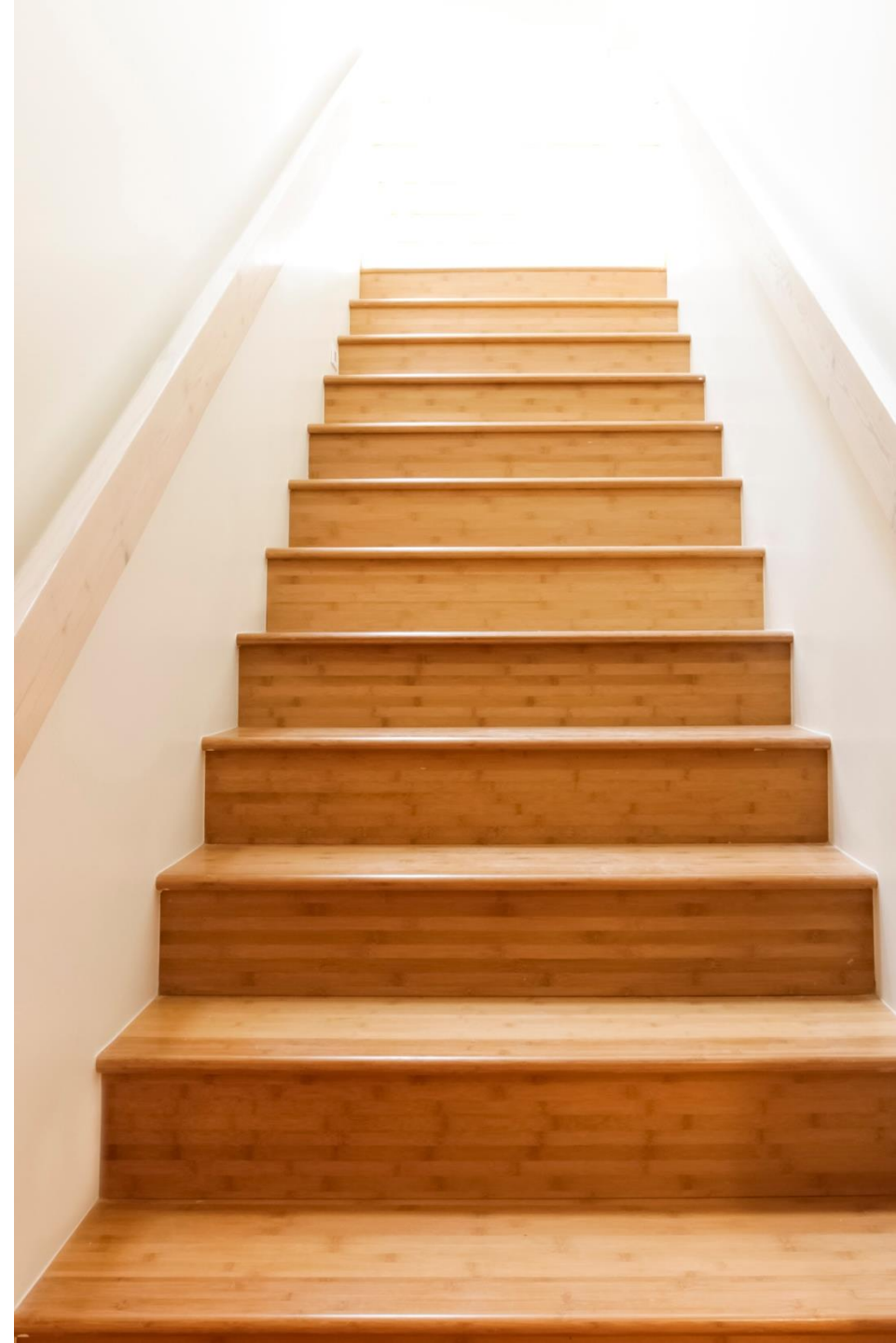
- Use the appropriate heading for your discipline
- Provide diagrams, charts, and illustrations as appropriate for your discipline
- Refer to sources as appropriate
 - *e.g.*, you're following a method, or a theoretical approach described by a previous researcher.



Methodology / Theoretical Framework (cont.)

Content

- Be specific about your theoretical or procedural approach
 - e.g. field observation, experimental study, critical analysis
- Provide as much detail about your methods as possible
 - How did you recruit your study participants?
 - How did you make measurements? What instruments or tools did you use?
- **If applicable**, describe your theoretical approach or type of analysis, if applicable (feminist, functionalist, Marxist, Freudian, etc)



Methodology / Theoretical Framework (cont.)

- Justify your approach – how will it contribute to the academic conversation?
 - filling a gap, offering an alternative, confirming or replicating, problematizing common understandings, etc.
- Acknowledge potential limitations or challenges you face
 - Will your results be reliable? How widely applicable will they be?
 - How will you attempt to address these limitations / challenges?



References

- Reference page
 - List only what is used
 - Follow discipline citation style
- Consider using a citation tool.
 - e.g. Endnote, Mendeley, RefWorks, Zotero



Reminders

- Be orderly
- Be thorough, but succinct
- Talk to your mentor
- Discipline and project design can impact the proposal (and paper)

