

Writing a Research Proposal

A practical guide for MA students in Libyan
universities and academies

Dr Albashir Ahmed

WRITING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

This book has been written to satisfy the need for a practical guide for MA Libyan students which takes them step by step in the process of writing a research proposal. It is the outcome of years of experience in teaching a ‘proposal writing seminar’ subject to postgraduates in the English department in the University of Zawia. However, we believe it will be useful for all MA students in the Libyan academic institutions who write their proposals in the English language.

The book is not meant to teach the students the methodology of writing research which is presumably should have been dealt with in a separate subject and which is considered a prerequisite for writing a proposal. Thus, in order for students to benefit much from this book, they should be first acquainted with the terminology, procedure and methodology of writing their research which will facilitate their understanding of the process of writing their proposals.

Finally, to make the content of this practical book easy to grasp, it is enhanced with images, diagrams and a lot of examples. Moreover, based on my experience in teaching the relevant courses, common errors made by students in writing their proposals are highlighted to help students avoid them when writing their own proposals.

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SECTION ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1 Why do you write a proposal?

Writing a proposal will help you as a student to define your research plan and to have focus while you are doing your research. However, your plan in your research proposal is not final and can be changed and developed during your research. Still, your plan in the proposal will give the reader an indication of your direction as a researcher. Your proposal should show that:

- your research is genuine and you are searching something useful.
- you are familiar with the theories and thoughts relevant to your topic through relating these theories and thoughts to your own work and through adopting a certain theory as a basis for your research
- your research methodology is clear, valid and reliable.
- you have taken ethical issues into your consideration.

1.2 Components of a Proposal (Structure)

A proposal generally includes five main parts:

I. PRELIMINARIES

II. INTRODUCTION

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN

V. REFERENCES

Each of these main parts may include a number of elements. However, the choice of the elements to be included in your proposal will need consulting your supervisor who may ask you to exclude some or add others which are seen important for your proposal.

Since the proposal is made of five main parts, the remaining of this guide will be divided accordingly into five main sections. In each section, a thorough and detailed account of each of the main parts of the proposal will be given. Examples from previous proposals written by students will also be given to clarify each element and help you fully understand ideas and write your proposal in the most proper way.

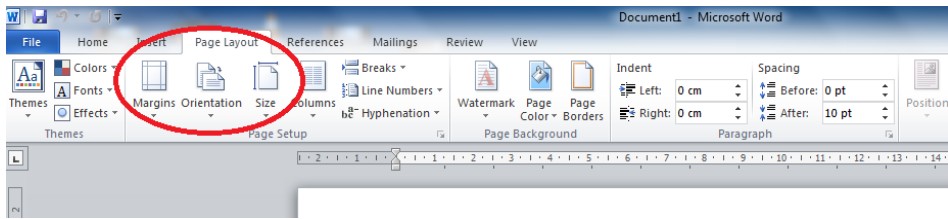
The order given for the main parts of the proposal above is the order found in the proposal. However, in this guide we will not start with the PRELIMINARIES, since even in the actual process of writing your proposal, writing the preliminaries is left to the end after

you finish writing the other parts. As you will see later the preliminaries include elements like the abstract, the acknowledgements, and the table of contents none of which can be written before the rest of the proposal is complete.

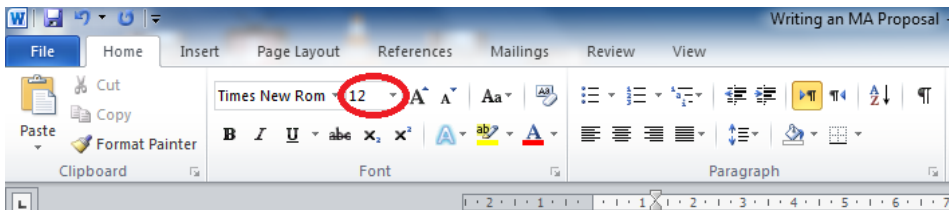
1.3 formatting your proposal

However, before we talk about each section in detail, we need to introduce certain procedures that are applicable to all parts. We presuppose that you are having at least basic typing skills and familiarity with Microsoft Word the most common editing and typing program in Libya. If you do not, then writing your proposal and later your MA thesis is a real opportunity to gain these skills. In order to save time and effort, from the start you need to do certain things. These include:

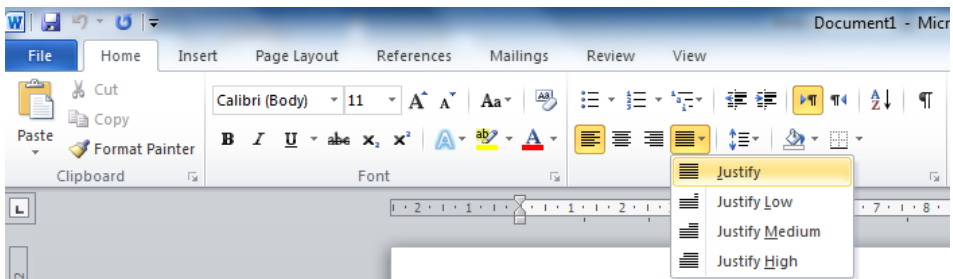
- ***Page Layout:*** Page layout is one of the functions found in the Microsoft Word main menu. Click on it and set up page margins, page size and page orientation. For margins, choose 'mirrored' which will give you the typical margins style for writing your proposal and thesis. For page orientation, select 'Portrait' and for size, choose 'A4'.



- **Font size:** Font size of the whole thesis should be 12 including titles and subtitles. A common error made by some students is that they write titles and subtitles in a bigger font size. In the Microsoft Word main menu, click on 'home' and adjust your font to size 12.



- Also, and in order to align your text to both left and write margins you need to highlight the 'justify' button by clicking on it.

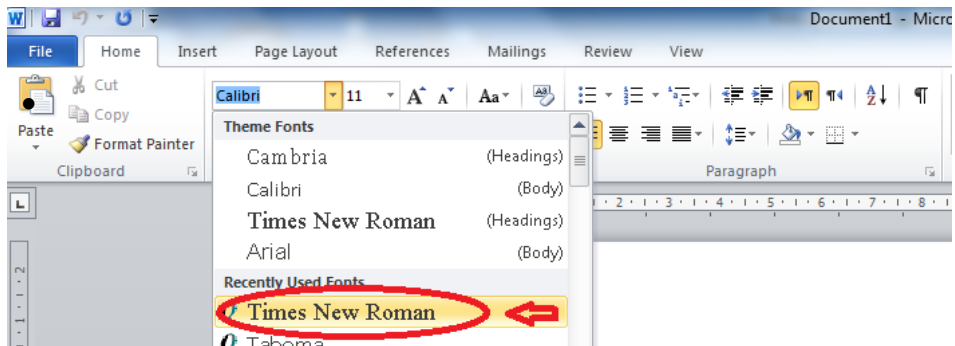


- If you do not know what 'justify' means here, have a look at the following two texts the first of which is justified while the second is not.

Also, each topic in the book is followed by a relevant exercise which is believed to help students have enough practice to reinforce understanding of syntactic ideas and concepts. In addition to exercises covering all topics, each unit is concluded with a summary of the main points dealt with in the unit. Some students find summaries very useful when revising and preparing for exams.

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- **Font type:** from the 'home' functions select 'Times New Roman' font type as it is the typical font type in academic works.



- **Space:** Generally, the whole proposal should be written in double space except for a few things which will be mentioned in due course. 'Double space' option can be done by selecting 'home' from the main menu in Microsoft Word and selecting 2.0 from

the options in the -drop-down list reached by clicking on the spacing button.



1.3.1 Paragraphing

As for paragraphing, remember to indent every paragraph by 5 points or alternatively you can separate paragraphs by double double space. You have to be consistent by using only one of these two methods throughout your proposal. A paragraph cannot be one sentence; it must be at least two sentences. Do not use very long sentences which hinder the understanding of your ideas. Also, in Academic writing it is not preferred to use the pronoun 'I' or 'you'. When you need to refer to yourself, use 'the researcher' instead although the use of the pronouns 'I' and 'you' is now becoming acceptable.

1.3.2 Punctuating

One rule in punctuation is that a punctuation mark is never

separated by a space from the preceding word. However, there should be a single space between a punctuation mark and the following word. A common error made by students when using punctuation marks is that they leave a space or more between the punctuation mark and the preceding word. So, make sure that you do not leave a space between any punctuation mark such as a comma or a period, and the preceding word.

Another common error in punctuation is that students separate sentences by commas. This might be due to interference from their native language Arabic in which it is possible to use commas between sentences. The general rule in English is that a sentence should end with a period (.) if it is a statement, an exclamation mark (!) if it is an exclamation sentence or a question mark (?) if it is a question but not with a comma.

Another error in punctuation is related to the use of brackets and quotation marks. Some students leave a space before and/or after the bracket or a quotation mark before or after the enclosed word, phrase or sentence. Therefore, you should make sure that no space is left between brackets or quotation marks and the element enclosed between them.

1.3.3 Headings and subheadings

Headings and subheadings can be found in all parts of the proposal. Therefore, formatting these headings should be clarified here so as not to repeat it in every section of this guide. In this context, a heading refers to the title of the chapter while a subheading refers to a subtitle. Formatting headings and subheadings from the beginning will enable you later to generate the table of contents automatically by just one click.

However, if you do not format headings and subheading, then you have to do the table of contents manually and you can imagine the effort and time you will spend in doing it manually. Moreover, whenever you make changes in your titles and subtitles, you have to make the same changes manually if your headings and subheadings have not been formatted in advance while changes will be made automatically if formatting is done. Let us start with headings and clarify the way they are written and formatted before we move to subheadings.

1.3.3.1 Headings

Headings refer to titles of chapters, e.g., chapter one: Introduction, Chapter two: Literature review, etc. In the main title of the

chapter, every word should be capitalized or alternatively, the whole title should be written in capitals. The following are some formats:

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Chapter One: Introduction

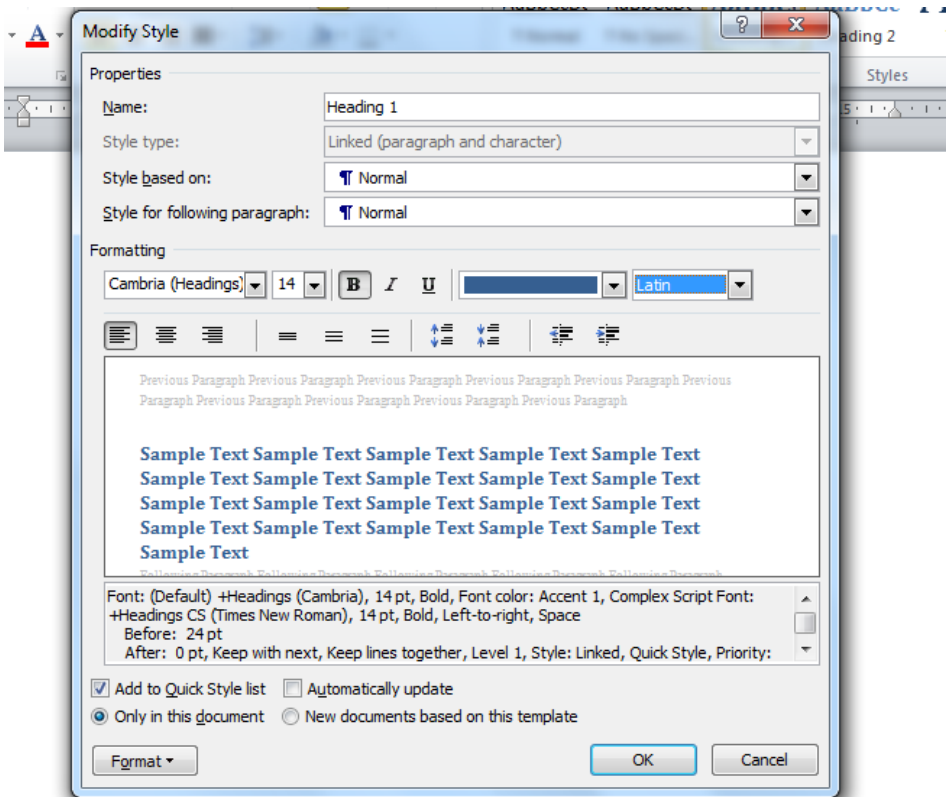
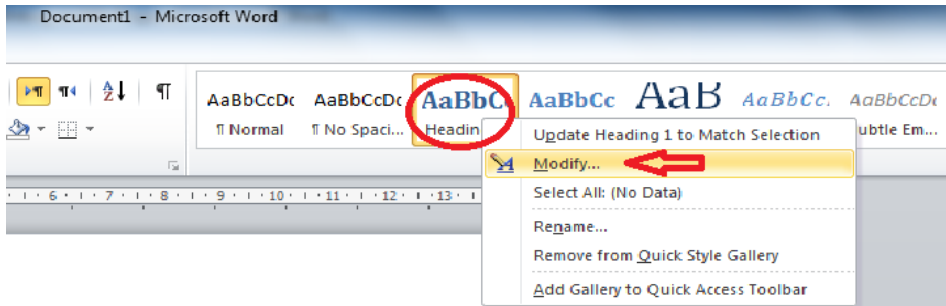
Chapter One
Introduction

Chapter I: Introduction

When you select a format for the title of chapter one, you have to use the same format for the other titles of chapters in the whole of your proposal.

The title of the chapter should be bold, centralized and placed double space below the upper margin of the page and separated from the following subtitle by double space. In order not to repeat this with main titles of subsequent chapters, select the title and move the cursor on Heading 1 which appears at the left side of the 'home' functions bar, right-click on it and click on 'modify'. Select the required

formatting options mentioned above and click OK. By clicking OK, selected title will appear in the selected options and which will be saved for further use with other titles of chapters.



1.3.3.2 Subheadings

Subheadings, on the other hand, refer to subtitles found in the chapter and these can be of three levels. Level 1 heading is referred to by two numbers, e.g., 1.1, 1.2, 1.3; 2.1, 2.2; 3.1; 4.4, etc. Level 2 heading is found under level 1 heading and is referred to by three numbers, e.g., 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.2.1; 2.1.2, 2.2.3, etc. Finally level 3 heading is indicated to by 4 numbers, e.g., 1.1.1.1, 1.2.3.4; 3.2.1.3, etc. It is not recommended, however, having more than 3 levels of subtitles in your proposal. You should also remember that you cannot have 2.1.1 if you do not have 2.1.2. In other words, you should have at least 2 subtitles in order to have a new subtitle level.

The first number of every subheading refers to the number of the chapter. For example, in *2.0 Introduction*, number 2 refers to the chapter number and 0 refers to the number of the subtitle *introduction*. In this course, we will give the introduction of every chapter number 0. However, other styles may start with number 1 instead of 0.

Like titles of chapters, subtitles should be bold. However, they should not be centralized nor written in capitals. Instead, they are aligned to left and capitalized. To format them, follow the same steps followed in formatting titles of chapters. Choose *'heading 2 style'* for level 1

subtitles, '*heading 3 style*' for level 2 subtitles and '*heading 4 style*' for level 3 subtitles, and modify each to be consistent with the requirements for each subtitle level. Finally, you should also bear in mind that every subtitle should be separated from the previous section by double double space but by only double space from the following text.

As said before, doing these steps before you start writing, will save you effort and time by not having to repeat the same steps every time you start writing. The following main section in this guide will be devoted to how to write the INTRODUCTION of your proposal although in reality some review of the literature should have been done before that.

SECTION TWO HOW TO WRITE THE INTRODUCTION

Your introduction chapter will consist of the following sections: Introduction, Background to the study, Statement of the problem, Aims of the study, Research questions or Research hypotheses, Significance or Importance of the study, Limitations and Delimitations and, finally, Organization of the study.

2.0 Introduction

In fact, every chapter should begin with an introduction including the introduction chapter. In the introduction to any chapter you highlight the most important points and concepts in the chapter. In other words, you give your reader some idea about what is included in the chapter. The introduction of this chapter is usually given the number 1.0 in which 1 refers to the number of the chapter while 0 refers to the introduction section. (For formatting procedure for subheadings, see headings and subheadings in Section One above)

2.1 Background to the study (Scope of the study)

In this section which is given number 1.1, you give background information related to, for example, the social, political, historical and/or educational context of the study. In this section you can also include your own motivation to conduct the study. The background of the study section aims to attract the attention of the reader by giving a basis for your research problem. It also aims at highlighting certain knowledge gaps which paves the way for clearly stating the problem in the following section.

2.2 Statement of the problem

In this section you say exactly what gap that exists in the literature, theory, or practice you aim to bridge in your research. Your argument concerning the problem should be logical and based on the factual information you stated in the previous section, i.e. the background section. However, what you write here should be to the point and concise, and you should avoid '*cut and paste*' from the background section.

2.3 Aims of the study

In this section, you should clearly state the purpose of the study. Aims should be outlined and described clearly and accurately. Your aims should be realistic and achievable and directly linked to your research study. They should also be related to your research questions and time bound, i.e., can be accomplished in the time available to your study.

2.4 Research questions or Research hypotheses

In this section you either have your research questions or hypotheses but not both. This helps you focus on one thing in your research. You either try to answer the research questions or testify or verify your hypotheses. As for research questions (usually What, How, Why, or What if), they should be related to your aims and should be few so that you will be able to manage them in your research. A research question poses a relationship between two or more variables in a form of a question. On the other hand, hypotheses are dictated by the nature of the study. They come in the form of declarative statements and, like research questions, show the relationship between two or more variables.

2.5 Importance (or Significance) of the study

In this section you try to convince the reader that the study will be useful and beneficial. Therefore, beneficiaries and how they may benefit from your findings and the way in which your study may be significant for the educational community should be mentioned in this section. Also, you may refer to a gap in the literature and mention the need to apply new ideas to fill in that gap.

2.6 Theoretical framework

Existing relevant theory or theories will provide a basis for the theoretical framework within which to place your research. To establish your framework, in this section you should mention main figures of the theory or theories you are going to adopt as a framework for your study. You also need to cite some important sayings and points in these theories which support your main idea. Finally, the link between these theories and your proposed study should be clarified and demonstrated.

2.7 Limitations and delimitations

Limitations mean any weaknesses of the study that the researcher is

not able to intervene or manage, e.g., instruments, sample size. You as a researcher need to think about threats to internal validity. Thus, in this section you need to explain how you are going to deal with these threats and how to overcome such limitations or at least minimize their effect.

Delimitations, on the other hand, are boundaries to the study that are set deliberately by the researcher. In this respect, you are required to show your reader how are you going to narrow the scope of the study, and what you are not going to do or include and why. e.g., the literature you will not review, the population you are not studying or the methodological procedures you are not using and why, etc. Finally, implications for the delimitations of your study need to be discussed.

2.8 Thesis organization

In this section, you give your proposed structure of your thesis and describe briefly the focus and content of each proposed chapter.

SECTION THREE

HOW TO WRITE THE LITERATURE REVIEW

In dealing with this topic, two major points are relevant: form and content. Form was discussed in the introduction of this guide since issues related to form are relevant to all chapters. Therefore, if you are not sure about any point related to form including titles and subtitles, font size and font type or spacing and paragraphing, you can go back to the introduction to check how it should be done.

In the following sections, content, citing conventions according to Harvard system and plagiarism will be discussed.

3.1 Content

The proposal must address all previous relevant research including books, dissertations and journal papers on the present topic in a coherent manner. It should not merely be a list of everything that has been written. Results from each study that are relevant to your research should be stated and evaluated within the context of your

topic. The purpose of the review is to learn how to study the current topic, building upon previous studies, within a theoretical framework.

Like the introduction chapter, this chapter should start with an introduction and since it is the introduction of the second chapter it will be numbered 2.0. In the introduction to this chapter, you need to provide a brief account of the structure of the chapter and the subsections contained. You should also refer to issues and topics you are going to consider in your review of the literature.

Other subsections in the chapter, which are numbered 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, etc. should show your supervisor and other readers that you have adequate knowledge of significant writers and researchers in the field. This chapter should clearly show your understanding of current research related to your topic through critical and systematic analysis of the points dealt with in the literature review. Your review should be marked by your own argument and establish your theoretical orientation.

However, at this stage of your research, your literature review is not expected to be extensive and your list of readings is only a tentative one since your reading of the literature will continue throughout your research and the more you read the broader your knowledge will become of the related literature in general and particularly of your topic.

When writing the chapter content, you need to do the following:

1. Use relevant headings developed from the research aims and objectives and in harmony with your topic as a whole to guide the organization of the chapter.
2. Put emphasis on the already existing knowledge related to the study problem.
3. Make it clear what is still not known about this study problem. i.e. the knowledge gap.
4. In addition to the knowledge gaps related to theory, you need to make obvious those gaps related to methodology and scope and how these affect your study.
5. Show evidence that you understand the topic of your research through appropriate, relevant and logical discussion.
6. Support your review style by using logical links in the flow of your arguments.
7. Give a summary at the end of your chapter emphasizing the main knowledge issues, controversial issues and main research gaps including the gap(s) you will address in your current research. Good summaries at the end of each chapter can help your reader identify the important points. Therefore, make sure that your summary is to the point, clear and informative.

3.2 Citation

Although most of the proposal is written in the present and future tenses, the reporting of the research reviewed is done with the past tense. It is used to report or describe the content, findings or conclusions of past research. However, in the final thesis, the methodology and findings are written in the past tense, since the study has already been done at that time.

Use a variety of ways to cite other people's works such as *stated*, *posited*, *suggested*, *said*, *found*, *claimed*, *argued*, *maintained*, *agreed*, *disagreed*, *highlighted*, *offered*, *confirmed*, *pointed out*, *added*, *clarified*, *affirmed*, *according to*, etc.

An example of a common error made by students when using '*according to*' is this:

According to Chomsky (1977), he said language is a set of rules...

This error is corrected as follows:

According to Chomsky (1977), language is a set of rules...

In-text citation occurs within the text of your work and should include the following information related to the cited work or source:

- The name of the author(s) or editor(s)
- The date of publication
- The page number(s) especially when you have a direct quotation

Citation within text according to Harvard system, the system adopted in this book, takes the following format:

(Author's Last Name, Year of Publication, Page Number(s))

Example:

As Pritchard (2007, p. 19) puts it 'the internet and its possibilities for email, ... have opened up many possibilities for long distance rapid communication, which can be used to good educational advantage.'

There are different systems for citation and referencing available for the students to use in their academic writing. However, the choice of any of these systems will be the one adopted by your department or the one recommended by your supervisor.

In what follows, we are going to adopt and discuss the conventions of the Harvard system due to its familiarity among Libyan students though your supervisor may suggest a different one. However, whatever system you select, you have to stick to its conventions throughout your work both for within-text citation and for the list of references at the end of your proposal or thesis.

3.2.1 Citing conventions according to Harvard system

All statements, opinions, conclusions etc. taken from another writer's work should be cited, whether the work is directly quoted, paraphrased or summarized. In Harvard System, cited publications are referred to in the text by giving the author's surname and the year of publication in one of the forms shown below. If details of particular parts of a document are required, e.g. page numbers, they should be given after the year within the parentheses.

- If the author's name occurs naturally in the sentence the year (and the page number) is given between brackets:

e.g. In a well-known study, Chomsky (1982, p.34) argued that

- If however, the name does not occur naturally in the sentence, both the name of the author and the year are given between brackets:

e.g. More recent studies (Johnson 2004; Dickens 2001) show that..

- When citing an author who has two publications in the same year, they are distinguished by lower case letters following the year:

e.g. Roca (2005a) studied this phenomenon and found....

- If there are two authors, the surnames of both are given:

e.g. Smith and Jeffry (2015) claimed that...

- If there are more than two authors the surname of the first author only is given, followed by et al:

e.g. Jacob et al. (1997) argued that ...

- If you refer to a source quoted in another work you cite both in the text:

e.g. As maintained by Wilson (1956 cited in Clinton 2012 p. 37), vowels are ...

(The work you have used, i.e. Clinton, should be listed in your list of references but please remember that it is always preferable to cite the original source; much use of 'cited in' is not recommended).

3.2.2 Ways of citing

There are two ways of citing references: in one, prominence is given to the author and in the other, prominence is given to the information cited.

3.2.2.1 Author prominent

In this way of citing, the author's surname is used as part of your sentence with the date and the page number in round brackets.

Direct quote example

Abdulla (2017, p. 16) argues that 'students use their mother tongue to simplify the target language and to create a kind of social interaction'.

Paraphrase example

Ahmed (2015) advises teachers not to teach listed words found in textbooks in isolation but to integrate them in contexts where these words are used naturally.

3.2.2.2 Information prominent

When the focus is on the cited information and not on the author, referencing details are put in brackets at the end of the citation.

Direct quote example

It has been recommended that ‘special and cooperative efforts should be made by both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to reform the educational system’ (Ahmed 2015, p.16)

Paraphrase example

The Department of English should make more efforts to improve the quality of exams by integrating the four language skills. (Ahmed 2015).

3.2.3 Page Numbers

When referring to the general idea of a book or article, do not use page numbers.

Wardhaugh (2002) suggested several explanations to the linguistic differences found between men and women.

But when referring to a specific point within a book or article, page number(s) should be indicated.

According to Silver (2001 p.4), 'learning disabilities are neurologically based and must be seen as a lifetime disability'.

3.2.4 Paraphrase or use quotations?

Paraphrasing means putting ideas taken from other sources into your own words while quotation is the use of the exact words from these sources. When writing your proposal or any other academic work, it is recommended that you paraphrase since too many quotations can be considered as a sign of poor writing. As a general rule you can paraphrase except when...

- the text quoted is remarkable and forceful in a way that paraphrasing may distort it or reduce its effect.
- using the quoted material as evidence for a major argument or idea.
- changing the original text may result in misinterpretation.

- there is a need to analyse the quoted material or to comment on its idea.

However, whether you use quotations or paraphrase, you should always remember to refer to your source both within the text and in the list of references.

3.2.4.1 Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing means restating accurately and precisely in your own words something you have read in a reference. If your work does not refer to specific ideas on particular pages of a source but to general themes mentioned throughout the source, page numbers need not be shown.

General theme

Saylor (2005) argued that poor pronunciation can cause a negative first impression.

Specific idea

Bittencourt (1993, p. 65) stated that the first language has a substantial influence on the second language mainly in the area of pronunciation, especially for adults and beginning level children.

2.2.4.2 Using direct quotations

When you decide to use quotations, you should select them carefully and integrate them into your text. Also, your quotations should be consistent and relevant to the context where they are used. Another important thing that you should keep in mind is that you keep your quotations exactly as they were in the source from which they are taken including the wording, the spelling and the punctuation. If, for example, there was a grammatical or spelling mistake in the original text you keep it as it is and you insert the word [sic] between square brackets to show your reader that you are aware of this error and that this error is not yours. Here is an example:

Adams (2018) states: 'The comparison of the scores of the two assessment methods have [sic] shown that students did better in the assignment than in the exam.'

Short quotations

Short quotations (30 words [about three lines] or less) should:

- be incorporated into your sentence without disrupting the flow of your paragraph
- have single quotation marks
- have the full stop after the citation
- keep the same font size.

Incorporating a quote as part of your sentence (information prominent)

Language can be described as ‘a systematic correlation between certain types of gesture and meaning’ (Robert & Van, 2004: p.1)

Incorporating a quote as part of your sentence (author prominent)

Robert and Van (2004: p.1) suggest that ‘[l]anguage has often been characterized as a systematic correlation between certain types of gesture and meaning’

The square brackets around the ‘l’ -[l]- are used to indicate that in the original quotation the word ‘language’ began with a capital L.

Long quotations

Long quotations (more than 30 words [about 3 lines]) should:

- be introduced in your own words followed by a colon.
- begin on a new line and separate it from previous text with one blank line.
- be fully indented by 5 points from the left margin
- be in single line spacing

- use a smaller font for the quotation, that is, change from size 12 to size 10.
- be separated from following text with one blank line.
- not include quotation marks.

Examples:

Author prominent quotation

Ortega (2009, p.12) describes two issues related to the relationship between age and second language acquisition by stating that:

One [issue] pertains to the possibility that a biological schedule may operate, after which the processes and outcomes of L2 acquisition are fundamentally and irreversibly changed. This is also known as the Critical Period Hypothesis in L2 learning. The other issue relates to the possibility that there may be a ceiling to L2 learning, in the sense that it may be impossible to develop levels of L2 competence that are isomorphic to the competence all humans possess in their own mother tongue.

Information prominent quotation

There are two issues related to the relationship between age and second language acquisition:

One [issue] pertains to the possibility that a biological schedule may operate, after which the processes and outcomes of L2 acquisition are fundamentally and irreversibly changed. This is also known as the Critical Period Hypothesis in L2 learning. The other issue relates to the possibility that there may be a ceiling to L2 learning, in the sense that it may be impossible to develop levels of L2 competence that are isomorphic to the competence all humans possess in their own mother tongue. (Ortega, 2009: p.12)

Words omitted from quotations

If you omit a word or more in the quotation an ellipsis mark must be used. However, omission of that word should not change the sense of the quotation: Here is an example:

Bachman and Palmer (1996: p.10) argue that '[i]f we want to use the scores from a language test to make inferences about individuals' ability ... we must be able to demonstrate how performance on that language test is related to language use in specific situations other than the language test itself.'

If the quotation does not begin at the start of a sentence, an ellipsis should be used to convey this to the reader. The following is an example:

One of the issues related to classroom writing assessment '... is that many teachers are ill prepared to provide productive assessment experiences for students'. (Lee, 2017: p.3)

The square brackets in quotations

Sometimes in quotations it is necessary to insert a word that explains the meaning of another word in that quotation. Place the explanation in square brackets.

Ahmed (2010, p. 2) maintains that 'Tripolitanian Arabic [the dialect spoken in the capital city of Tripoli Libya] has some sounds that are not found in the standard variety of Arabic'.

3.3 Plagiarism

Plagiarism is using other people's works without referring to them. These works may include their notions, words, figures, charts and pictures. According to this definition, therefore, plagiarism does not only occur when you copy words from another source without mentioning that source but also when you paraphrase someone's ideas without giving credit to the original author. Thus, plagiarism is considered a kind of cheating and dishonesty and may have disastrous consequences. If you plagiarize other people's works without giving them credit, you are considered a law-breaker and you may at least obtain a grade of zero.

In order not to be guilty of plagiarism and to avoid legal punishment, you must give a credit to any work you use that is not yours by using proper citation and quotation. Moreover, when it is necessary to use pictures, figures or charts from other sources, reference must be made to these sources not only in the list of references but within text where the picture, figure, diagram or chart is used.

The following are some examples of plagiarism:

- If you submit or present wholly or partially someone else's work or impersonate the student submitting the work or substituting the work of another for your own including exams and tests.
- If you use parts of a work from another source without referring to the original writer;
- If you submit or present a work in one course that has been submitted in another course even if it was completely yours without consulting your teacher or supervisor to obtain his/her consent and agreement.

SECTION FOUR

HOW TO WRITE THE RESEARCH DESIGN

In the research design (or methodology) chapter you should discuss the procedures you will use to gather, present and analyse your data. The chapter should outline and describe the research plans and ways in which your research will be conducted. In particular you need to...

- identify the methodology and show your understanding of the nature of knowledge and how this affects your choice of research approach.
- describe the specific methods, techniques or procedures you will use to collect and analyse your data.
- describe procedures you will use to ensure ethical practice, validity and reliability.
- convince the reader that these techniques or procedures are appropriate for the type of study you are proposing.
- give a statement about the delimitations (scope) of the study and mention any limitations, e.g. ethical, resources, skills.

What is said about the form in writing the literature review chapter applies to the methodology chapter. For example, spacing, font size and type are the same as those used in the literature review chapter. Techniques used for headings and subheadings, paragraphing, citing and punctuating are also the same as those used in the literature review chapter. Regarding tense, the most common tense in the methodology chapter is the simple future although the present simple is used occasionally especially when talking about facts and when citing from other references.

As for citing, you are advised to support your choice of the methods of data collection and techniques with other references. Particularly, you should talk about their advantages and disadvantages and how to deal with these drawbacks and shortcomings in your own research. The following is an overall outline of the methodology chapter though yours might differ in some way or another depending on the nature of your research and the methodology used.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter, like other chapters, should start with an introduction that is numbered 3.0 where number 3 refers to the number of the chapter and number 0 refers to the number of the introduction. In the

introduction to this chapter, you need to provide a brief account of the structure of the chapter and the subsections contained.

4.2 Research design

In this section you should state the design and the overall methodology adopted in your research (e.g. experimental, descriptive, historical, qualitative, quantitative) and provide reasons for your choice and link the design to the study topic. You also need to specify the actual data collection methods (e.g. survey, questionnaire, test, interview, observation).

In the research design section you may also include a timetable in which you mention stages or steps of your research which can be shown in a form of a chart or a table or any other form.

4.3 Location of the study

Here you mention the location of the study and the setting where the research will be conducted. You also need to justify your choice of that location and discuss the characteristics of that location relevant to the study problem.

4.4 Target population and sample

In this section you describe the population from which your research sample will be selected. You should also justify your choice of the target population. The sampling techniques and sample size should be explained. For example, you can explain the method of deriving the sample from the population you identified...e.g. random sampling. The sample size should also be given at least roughly at this stage, e.g. how many students, how many teachers, males, females.

4.5 Research instruments

This section should describe the instruments of data collection used in the study. Research instruments are the tools used to collect the data like interview, questionnaire, observation, experiment, etc. You should link your instruments to your objectives and the research questions you wrote in the introduction chapter to ensure that data is generated for each objective and research question and to guide your findings in the discussion chapter.

4.6 Piloting study

Here you describe how the research instruments will be tested by

using a pilot study to ensure the validity and reliability of the study.

4.7 Data collection techniques

This section explains how field data collection will be done using the specific methods, e.g. questionnaire, experiment, interview, pre and post-test, etc.

4.8 Data analysis

In this section, you need to explain the methods and procedures that will be applied in analysing the data relating them to your hypotheses and research questions. You also need to mention the software you used in your analysis, e.g. SPSS. You should also mention how data will be presented after analysis is completed, e.g. text, tables, graphs, etc.

4.9. Ethical considerations

Here you explain your understanding of research ethics and show how you will observe ethical issues related to researching human subjects and considerations you will use to protect human rights of the research subjects and to ensure they suffer no harm from the research

process and outcomes (e.g. confidentiality, anonymity, informed consents)

3.10. Summary

A summary of the main points and ideas is recommended at the end of every chapter.

SECTION FIVE HOW TO WRITE THE REFERENCES LIST

5.1 A reference list or a bibliography?

Some students confuse between a list of references and a bibliography. A reference list is a list of all of the sources you have cited in your work while a bibliography is a list of the sources you have read and used to help you write your assignment but not cited. When you write a proposal or thesis, you are expected to write a list of references not a bibliography.

In the references section in your proposal, you list all references and works that have been cited in your proposal. This section should follow the same referencing system used when you cited these references within text. You should consult your department and your supervisor about the referencing system you use for both within-text citation and in the list of references at the end of your proposal. Since we have used the conventions of Harvard system in citing sources within text, we will give some idea about how to use the same

referencing system and its conventions in writing the list of references.

When using Harvard system to write the list of references, you should take into consideration the following points:

- The reference list should be at the end of your proposal on a separate page and entitled 'references'. The title *references* should be centralized and capitalized or alternatively written in capitals. Follow the same procedure of writing the titles of chapters to write the title of the list of references but you do not call it a chapter.
- Only references you have cited in your work should be included in your list of references. References that have not been cited within text should not appear on the list.
- References should be listed alphabetically.
- In every entity or reference, all lines should be indented except for the first line which should not be indented.
- Every entity is written in single space if it is more than one line, and entities should be separated by double space.

In what follows we will give illustration of how to make reference to a variety of sources including books, journals, theses, etc.

5.2 Reference to a book

When you make a reference to a book, you will need the following information:

- Author(s) and/or editor(s) surname(s) / and the initial(s) of their first name(s)
- Publication date (year)
- Book title
- Book edition (If it is not the 1st edition)
- Place of publication (town/city)
- Publisher name

The elements mentioned above should take the following format when making a reference.

Author's Surname, Initials. (Year of publication) Title of the book. Edition (if not the first). Place of publication: Publisher.

5.2.1 A book with one author

Examples:

Troike, M. S. (2006) *Introducing Second language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yule, G. (2006) *The study of language*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

5.2.2 A book with more than one author

In the reference list you must provide all authors' surnames and initials.

Examples:

Fromkin, V., Rodman, R., and Hyams, N. (2017) *An Introduction to Language*. Boston: Language Learning Inc.

Beals, K., Dahl, D., Fink, R. and Linebarger, M. (2016) *Speech and Language technology for language Disorders*. Boston: Walter de Gruyter Inc.

5.2.3 Chapters in an edited book

An edited book is a book which is made up of chapters written by different authors and edited by one or more individuals. Use *ed.* if the book has one editor and use *eds.* if the book has more than one editor.

Scott, S. K. (2008) 'Perception and production of speech: Connected, but how?' in Gaskell, M. G. and Mirkovic, J., eds. *Speech Perception and Spoken Word*. Oxon: Routledge.

5.2.4 A book with an editor and no author(s)

If you use a book with no author but it has an editor, you start your reference entry with the name(s) of the editor(s).

Example:

Leonard, W. R. and Crawford, M. H., eds. (2002) *Human biology of pastoral populations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

5.2.5 A book with no author

When the author is not given for a book, the book title is placed in the author spot.

Example:

Cambridge advanced learner's Dictionary (2010) 2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

5.2.6 An E-book

When including an electronic book in your list of references, you need to show that the book is available online by using [online] between square brackets, and you should also mention the website from which the book was retrieved by using '*available from*' preceding the website address. Finally, you need to mention the date you accessed the book.

Example:

Joshi, M. (2016) Simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences. Bookrix [online], available from: www.bookrix.com [accessed 24 April 2018].

5.2.7 Translated book

If you have cited a translated book, then you need to include it in

the list of references and you need to mention the translator in your entry of that reference in the list of references.

Example:

Saint, A. (2000) The little price. Translated by R. Howard and D. M. Barbosa. London: Harcourt, Inc.

Notice that the translators' names are write in the normal order starting with initials abbreviated and ending with surnames.

5.3 Journal articles

A journal can be a print one or an online journal. Whether your source is an online journal or a printed one, you will need the following elements to include your source in the list of references:

- The surname(s) and initial(s) of the author(s) of the article
- Date of publication
- Title of the article and title of the journal
- Volume and issue numbers
- The page number(s) of the entire journal article

The elements mentioned above should take the following format when making a reference.

Author's Surname, Initials. (Year of publication) 'Title of the article'. Title of the journal Volume number (issue number), The page numbers of entire article.

5.3.1 Print journal article

Examples:

Strange, W. (1989) 'Evolving theories of vowel perception'. *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 85 (5), 2081-87.

Studdert-Kennedy, M. (1993) 'Discovering phonetic function'. *Journal of Phonetics*, 21, 147–155.

5.3.2 Online journal articles

You can use online journal articles as references in your study. These can be found online in different formats such as PDF or web pages. The way you include an online article as a reference in your list of references is similar to that of including an ordinary journal article described above. The only difference is adding the URL address of the website from where you obtained the reference and the access date.

Example:

Powell, D. (2017) 'Brother, can you Paradigm? Toward a theory of Pedagogical content knowledge in social studies', *Journal of Teacher Education*, 69 (3) 29 March, pp. 252-262, available from: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0022487117708553> [accessed 24 April 2018]

5.4. Theses and dissertations

To make an entry of a theses or a dissertation in your list of references you will need the following information:

- The author's name
- The title of the thesis or dissertation
- Its type (MA, MSc or PhD)
- The university

These elements should take the following format when making a reference.

Author's Surname, Initials. (Year of publication) Title of the thesis or dissertation. Thesis or dissertation type, Name of the University.

Like journals, theses and dissertations are of two types: print and online.

5.4.1 Print theses and dissertations

Examples:

Smith, R. (2004) *The role of fine phonetic detail in word segmentation*. PhD Thesis. Department of Linguistics, Cambridge University.

Hussain, A. (1985) *An experimental investigation of some aspects of the sound system of the Gulf Arabic dialect with special reference to duration*. PhD Thesis. University of Essex.

5.4.2 Online theses and dissertations

Electronic theses can also be available online from some university electronic libraries. If you included one in your list of references and in addition to the information mentioned above, you need to mention the website address (URL) and the access date.

Example:

Ahmed, A. M. A. (2008) Production and perception of Libyan vowels. PhD thesis. Newcastle University. Available from .
<https://theses.ncl.ac.uk/dspace/bitstream/10443/846/1/Ahmed08.pdf>. [accessed 24 April 2018]

5.5 Web resources

If information from the web is used as a source in your research, you will need the following details:

- Surname(s) and initial(s) of author
- Web address (URL) and name
- Title of page or article
- Date of publication
- Date when you accessed the website
- Page numbers used i.e. if you access a PDF document

These pieces of information can take the following format in an entry:

Author's Surname, Initials. (Date of publication) Title of page or article [online], available from: Website address [access date]
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5.5.1 Web document with an author

Example:

Alizadeh, F and Hashim, M. N. (2016) Eclectic approach [online], available from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eclectic_approach [accessed 25 April 2018].

5.4.2 Web document with a corporate author

Example:

Aljazeera (2018) Palestinians: Stories Of resistance [online], available from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/aljazeera-selects/2018/04/palestinians-stories-resistance-180423062537385.html> [accessed 25 April 2018].

The following is a list of the references used in this chapter to illustrate to you some points discussed in this chapter like indentation of lines subsequent to the first line in an entity, writing entities in single space and separating entities with double space, and arranging the list alphabetically.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, A. M. A. (2008) Production and perception of Libyan vowels. PhD thesis. Newcastle University. Available from <https://theses.ncl.ac.uk/dspace/bitstream/10443/846/1/Ahmed08.pdf> [accessed 24 April 2018]
- Alizadeh, F and Hashim, M. N. (2016) Eclectic approach [online], available from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eclectic_approach [accessed 25 April 2018].
- Aljazeera (2018) Palestinians: Stories Of resistance [online], available from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/aljazeera-selects/2018/04/palestinians-stories-resistance-180423062537385.html> [accessed 25 April 2018].
- Beals, K., Dahl, D., Fink, R. and Linebarger, M. (2016) Speech and Language technology for language Disorders. Boston: Walter de Gruyter Inc.
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- Hussain, A. (1985) *An experimental investigation of some aspects of the sound system of the Gulf Arabic dialect with special reference to duration*. PhD Thesis. University of Essex.
- Joshi, M. (2016) Simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences. Bookrix [online], available from: www.bookrix.com [accessed 24 April 2018].
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- Powell, D. (2017) 'Brother, can you Paradigm? Toward a theory of Pedagogical content knowledge in social studies', *Journal of Teacher Education*, 69 (3) 29 March, pp. 252-262, available from: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0022487117708553> [accessed 24 April 2018]
- Saint, A. (2000) The little price. Translated by R. Howard and D. M. Barbosa. London: Harcourt, Inc.
- Scott, S. K. (2008) 'Perception and production of speech: Connected, but how?' in Gaskell, M. G. and Mirkovic, J., eds. *Speech Perception and Spoken Word*. Oxon: Routledge.

Strange, W. (1989) 'Evolving theories of vowel perception'. *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 85 (5), 2081-87.

Studdert-Kennedy, M. (1993) 'Discovering phonetic function'. *Journal of Phonetics*, 21, 147–155.

Smith, R. (2004) *The role of fine phonetic detail in word segmentation*. PhD Thesis.
Department of Linguistics, Cambridge University.

Troike, M. S. (2006) *Introducing Second language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yule, G. (2006) *The study of language*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

SECTION SIX

HOW TO WRITE THE PRELIMINARIES

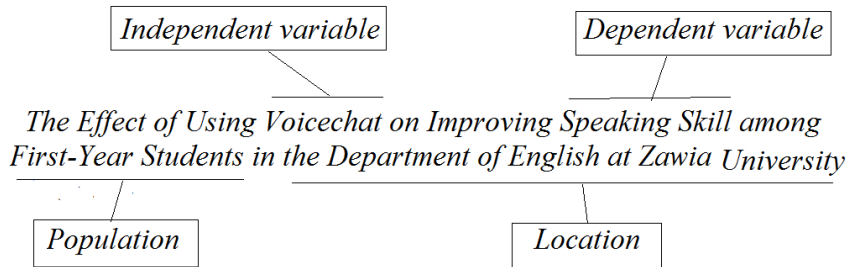
Preliminaries refer to proposal parts found before the introduction. These include the Title page, Declaration page, Dedication page, Acknowledgements, Table of contents, Glossary of terms, and Abstract.

6.1 Title page (Cover page)

- It shows your title or topic, your name as the writer of the proposal, your department, faculty and university and finally, the degree the proposal is for. In order to write a good title you need to take into account the following points:
 - Make sure that your title is not more than 20 words.
 - Do not include words, phrases and clauses which do not enhance its clarity and accuracy. e.g. *A study of.....*
 - Avoid using unfamiliar and unnecessary abbreviations, repetitions, etc.
 - Do not begin titles with ambiguous phrases such as '*Factors influencing ...*'

- Include location of study, variables, and target population to show internal consistency of the study.

The following is an example of a good research title that has the above mentioned characteristics:



6.2 Declaration page

In this page you declare that the proposal is your own work and that it has not been presented in any other institution or university for consideration of a certificate. Here is an example of a declaration that you can use for your proposal if your supervisor or institute do not suggest another format.

Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this research proposal entitled:

Using Flash Cards for improving vocabulary learning by Libyan primary school students

and that no part has been plagiarized. I also declare that all the material submitted in this work which is not my own work has been identified with proper citation and referencing, and that no material is included which has been submitted for any other qualification of other subjects or courses.

6.3 Dedication page

In this page you can dedicate your work to the people you choose including, for example, your family members, your previous teachers and your friends.

6.4 Acknowledgements

In this part you can acknowledge the help of individuals including your supervisor, groups, institutions or organizations. Acknowledgements should not be more than one page in your proposal.

6.5 Table of contents

In the table of contents, you list all the contents of your proposal including sections and subsection by giving their headings and subheadings and their page numbers. Use Arabic numerals to number your headings and subheadings, e.g. 1, 1.1, 1.2,; 1.1.1, 1.1.2.; 1.1.1.1, 1.1.1.2,....etc. However, you are not allowed to use more than four digits. For instance you cannot use 1.1.1.1.1 or 1.1.1.1.2.

Table of contents can be created manually or automatically. However, as said before, creating your table automatically will save you

a lot of effort and time. To create your table of contents manually you should have formatted your headings and subheading as was clarified in the introduction chapter. If you have not done so, you can go through all your headings and subheading and format them by selecting each one and clicking the suitable heading. (See the introduction chapter for details of how to format headings and subheading and how to modify them).

To ensure that your table of contents shows the correct page numbers. You need to use the correct type of numbers. Conventionally, Roman numbers are used with the preliminaries and Arabic numbers are used with the rest of the proposal. The trick to do this is to insert, what is called in the computer terminology, a **break** between the preliminaries and the introduction to create separate sections and then by **breaking the link** between these two sections. However, before creating these two separate sections and breaking the link between them, you need first to add page numbers to your document. If you do not know how to do that, follow these steps.

1. Click on **Insert** on the main menu of Microsoft Word.
2. Click on page number and select where you want your page numbers to appear by clicking on your selection.

Now after having added page numbers to your document, it is time to divide your documents into separate sections: one for the preliminaries and the other for the rest of the document. To do so, follow the following steps.

1. Click at the end of the last page in the preliminaries.
2. On the **Page Layout** tab, click on **Breaks**.
3. Under **Section Breaks**, click on **Next Page**. This will create two sections one for the preliminaries and the other for the remaining of the document.

Tip: In order to visualise the sections you have created go click the **Home** tab and then click the **Show/Hide** button to highlight it. This will switch on formatting marks including section labels so that you can see them. To see section labels, right-click on the status bar and tick section.

4. IN section 2, Double-click at the area where your page numbers are located (header or footer). Now you can see that Section 2 is labelled **Same as Previous** which means that Section 2 is still linked to Section 1 and thus both still use the same numbering style.
5. To break this link, on the **Header & Footer tools Design** tab click **Link to Previous** to break the link with Section 1. Now the **Same**

as Previous label disappears which means that the two sections are no longer linked and as a result you will be able to change page numbering style in Section 1 without affecting section 2.

6. On the **Header & Footer Tools Design** tab, click **Previous** to go to Section 1.
7. Click **Page Number** and select **Format Page Number**.
8. Select the **Number format** you want (Latin numbers) and click **OK**. This will change the number format for the preliminaries section

Now you have different numbering format for the two sections of your document: Roman numbers for the preliminaries and Arabic numbers for the rest of the document. However, if you go to section 2, you can notice that this section does not start from number 1. In order to start this section from number 1, go through the following steps:

1. From the **Insert tab**, click **Page Number** and select **Format Page Number**
2. Change **Start At:** to **1** and click **OK**. No section 2 starts at 1.
3. Click **Close Header and Footer**.

Now if you go to the first page of your document you can see that it shows page number. In order not to show page number on the

first page, double click on the area where page number is located (Header or Footer) and on the options group on the Design tab tick *Different First Page*. This will cause first page number to disappear.

Now after we have formatted page numbering for the whole proposal by giving Roman numbers for the preliminaries and Arabic numbers for the rest of the proposal, it is time to create your table of contents. This will be done automatically if you have formatted all your heading and subheadings of the entire proposal. To do so follow these steps:

1. Put the cursor where you want your table of contents to appear.
2. In the main menu of Word, click on *References* tab.
3. On the *Table of Contents* Navigation group, click on the small arrow that appears on the right of *Table of Contents*. Select the style you want for your table of contents and click OK.

Now you can see your Table of Contents appear in the style you selected. Do not worry if you have made any changes or corrections in your proposal in your headings or subheadings or if the page numbers where these headings and subheading have changes as a result of adding more text anywhere in your proposal. You can update your table of

contents by just one click. To update your table of contents at any time follow the steps below:

1. Go to the top of the first page of your table of contents and click on your table of contents.
2. Click on **update table...Table of Contents Box** will show up giving you two options of how you want to update your Table of Contents.
3. Select the option you want and click OK.

Now your table of contents has been updated and any change you have made of headings and subheading within text of your proposal will show in the updated Table of Contents.

6.6 Glossary of terms, abbreviations, and acronyms

In the glossary you list all specialized terms and words and their meanings in order to make the reader acquainted with them. They may include words from another culture or key concepts in a new field. They should be written in capitals and separated from text by two indentions of 5-point each. The following are some examples:

CA	Communicative Approach
IT	Information Technology
EA	Error Analysis

6.7 Abstract

In this page you summarize the whole proposal. You can do this by mentioning your topic and including a statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research design and methods of data collection, methods of data analysis and, finally, giving justification of your study. Your abstract should not be more than 500 words.

Bibliography

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- Lange, Cheryl. *Write your research proposal*. The University of Western Austria.
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- Talab, Rosemary, *Guidelines for writing dissertation Proposals and dissertations*. Kansas State University
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