A research proposal is intended to outline the plans for a research study in a straightforward manner so that the scientific merit of the research can be evaluated objectively. You want to show how your research would fill in existing gaps in some area of psychological research. Psychological research proposals include an **Introduction** section (statement of the topic of interest and summary of existing psychological literature), **Method** section, and **References** page.

The proposal should highlight students’ critical thinking skills, writing skills (including APA style), familiarity with psychological terminology, and overall grasp of the research process.

Given this is a first attempt to design a research study students are strongly encouraged to focus on a **simple and feasible design**. It is more important to demonstrate a solid understanding of the basics of research methods than to develop a grandiose research study of a complex topic. For this reason, students should focus on a basic experimental or correlational design. The study should examine only a few variables (at least one independent and one dependent variable), whether taking a causal or correlational approach. Students must propose a study based on UML student participants to avoid the ethical challenges of research with minors, clinical patients, and other special populations.

The best way to refine one’s research question and develop a design for a study is to read and take notes on previous studies. Students should pay attention to the details of each article.

**Step 1: Summarize each of your five empirical articles**

- Use the 6 basic questions included in HW#4 as a template to summarize each of your five articles. Make sure they are empirical articles (actual research studies with Method and Results sections).

**Step 2: Introduction (5-6 pages)**

**Note:** The focus of the Introduction is reviewing previous studies, which is called the “literature review.” Our text explains how to write an APA style Introduction in detail in chapter 16.

- Rough draft due on Tuesday, Mar. 7

- First, create an opening paragraph that introduces your topic and explains why it is important to the field of psychology. If your study will fill gaps in previous research, briefly explain how. End the paragraph by providing a preview of the research studies you are about to describe.

- Briefly describe the basic method (participants, measures, procedure) and major findings from each of your 5 articles. For each study, keep your description of the method in one paragraph and your description of the results in a separate second paragraph. Avoid the “string of pearls” approach (i.e., this study said this, that study said that, etc.). **Find ways to describe the studies in an interesting and coherent way.** You may decide to group the studies by similar samples, similar measures, or arrange them chronologically. Include **transition sentences** that connect the studies as you describe them. Keep descriptions of previous studies in **PAST TENSE.**
After describing previous research, comment on the strengths and weakness across your five studies. Explain what you think is lacking in this area of research and indicate how your study may help to “fill in the gaps” in this area of psychology.

The end of your introduction should include a paragraph restating the main questions you hope to answer through your study. Then for each question you list, provide a specific hypothesis for what you expect to find based on previous research; if you can find no previous research on a question you are asking, you may offer a well-reasoned hypothesis based on thinking or experience. It’s ok to use bullets here. You must also include a statement that identifies your independent and dependent variables are and how you will operationally define each.

Step 3: Method (1-2 pages)

Rough draft due on Tuesday, Mar. 28

Method sections are brief but provide a very detailed description of exactly what you plan to do in your study for other researchers who may want to replicate your study (like a recipe). Keep your plans in the FUTURE TENSE (e.g., “UML students will be recruited through email.”).

The Method section begins immediately after the Introduction (no spaces) with the word Method (bolded) in the middle of the page. Do not move the Method section to the top of the next page. The Method section includes the following three sub-sections (headings are bolded, left justified).

Participants
Number of participants desired, age range, ethnic background, how recruited, etc.

Measures
Depending on the design of the study, describe survey or instrument used, provide example questions, provide observation checklists, mention whether you plan to pilot measures, etc.

Procedure
Describe overall procedure including setting, materials, consent, collecting data, and debriefing.

Step 4: Final research proposal

Due in class on Tuesday, April 18 – NO PROPOSALS ACCEPTED VIA EMAIL!

Final draft of proposal in APA style includes:

- Title page with running head
- Abstract
- Introduction section
- Method section
- References page
- All previous articles summaries, drafts, etc. (will not receive full credit without drafts)

The proposal must be a minimum of 8 pages (Title, Abstract, 4-6 Intro, 1-2 Method, & References) and no more than 11 pages, unless you get permission from Dr. Leonard.
APA Style Formatting

- Use only TIMES NEW ROMAN 12-PT font and double-space all pages
- ONE-INCH margins (only) throughout
- Insert page numbers in top right of page header (including first page)
- Don’t forget the running head phrase in the header of each page that matches the title page
- Must have a separate APA style title page (see sample)
- The Introduction section begins at the very top of the second page after repeating the title (DO NOT write the word “Introduction”)
- The Method section begins immediately after the Introduction section – no spaces (DO write the word “Method”)
- The References page is on a separate page (see sample)
- **Citations and quotes in the text of your paper must be in APA style (examples below):**

**Citation in text:** Use this kind of citation whenever you are describing one of the studies in your own words. *You will have many of these throughout your paper.*

Piaget (1969) acknowledged that adolescence was a fertile time for religious exploration due to advances in abstract thinking brought on by formal operations.

**Direct quote in the text:** Insert a direct quote from the article only when you feel you cannot convey the same idea in your own words or the author’s words will really enhance your paper. *You should have very few direct quotes in such a short paper (if any – no more than three).*

A simpler conceptualization of religiosity is the belief that “that religion is important to their conception and interpretation of reality (Zelnik, Kantner, & Ford, 1981, p. 42).”

**If a direct quote takes up more than three lines, you need to separate it out as a block quote that is indented, single-spaced, and without “” marks:**

A common shortcoming of behavior-change interventions is that efficacy is demonstrated in the short term but disappears in the longer-term follow-up. This may particularly be a problem for abstinence interventions. Unlike many risk behaviors, sexual intercourse is an age-graded behavior; the expectation is that people will eventually have sexual intercourse (Jemmott, Jemmott, & Fong, 2010, p. 153).

Whenever you use a block quote, be sure to prepare the reader for the quote beforehand and comment on the quote afterward. Do not simply stick the quote in your paper to take up space!

**Sample APA style title page and References page follow**
A Multidimensional Exploration of Religiosity’s Role in Adolescent Sexual Activity

Kathleen Cobb Leonard

University of Massachusetts Lowell
References


(Notice the references are in alphabetical order by first author’s last name.)
Sample language for an APA style Introduction section

(Notice that all phrasing is in the THIRD PERSON.)

Existing research in this area suggests that…

Previous studies have found…

There is a lack of research on…

Past studies have explored…but have overlooked one key aspect of…

One study by (give authors, year) found….while another study by (give authors, year) found….

Whereas the previous study was based on a sample of….the next study reviewed here was based on a sample of….

While most previous studies have used a survey design, one study by (give authors, year) used interviews to explore…..

Taken together, the studies reviewed here suggest that…

While previous research points to a correlation between….and……, more research is needed to fully understand…..

Additional studies may help to illuminate the factors contributing to the relationship between…and…

The current study will explore the relationship between….

The current research seeks to investigate whether there is a difference between….and…

The author hypothesizes that…will predict…in a sample of….

The current study will test whether…and…are positively or negatively correlated…

***Also refer to Ch. 16 in your text and http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/
Method

Participants

The sample will include… (age, gender, ethnicity, other important characteristics breakdown) UML undergraduate students. Participants will be recruited by… (random selection, psych. Majors, flyers, emails, etc.). The target sample will include XX - XX participants.

Measures

Measures will include a combination of close-ended survey questions and open-ended interview questions. The survey contains XX items. The survey will include Smith’s (2000) personality scale (α = .89) and other personality questions designed for the purposes of this study, including some adapted from Smith and Hughes (2002) personality scale for adults. The survey will be piloted on….It should take participants XX-XX minutes to complete these measures.

The interview includes 12 questions. Interview questions will ask about participants experiences….and what they think about….

After presenting video stimuli, participants’ heart rate will be taken every 15 minutes and recorded on a laptop computer by the experimenter and research assistant. Pre-test measures will assess…

Procedure

Participants will be brought into a research laboratory, classroom, etc…Informed consent will be given to all participants prior to beginning the study. Surveys will be distributed… Groups will be formed… Groups will be given the same task before and after exposure to the intervention…. Participants will be observed for approximately one hour while performing the… The interview will be conducted in a private office-setting and will last approximately 30-45 minutes. Participants will be given X to thank them for their time. Debriefing will include…