



**RHODES UNIVERSITY**

*Where leaders learn*

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
RESEARCH PROPOSAL GUIDELINES**

Version 3

*Version 1: Approved EHDC March 2012*

*Version 2: Approved EHDC May 2014*

*Version 3: Approved EHDC August 2014*

The research proposal:

- builds a **coherent and appropriate argument** for the proposed research project
- addresses the questions *What, Why, How, Where, When* and *Who*?
- offers a map, signalling important aspects and directions of the research journey.
- it points primarily to **key ideas** avoiding extensive detail.
- addresses ethical concerns

NB: The development of your proposal must be done in collaboration with your supervisor/s.  
[Refer to RU **Higher Degrees Guide** for information relating to working with your supervisor/s]

# 1. Format

## Length

Maximum lengths for proposals (excluding references and addenda):

Masters half-thesis:	8 - 12 pages
Masters full research thesis:	12 - 15 pages
PhD thesis:	15 - 20 pages

Proposals exceeding the maximum length will not be considered by the Education Higher Degrees Committee.

## Style

A research proposal should be typed in on A4 paper and in 11 to 12 point font size.

All proposals must have a front page that includes the following:

- *Name* of the candidate
- The student *number*.
- The *degree* for which the proposal is being submitted.
- The *department* in which the candidate will be carrying out the research.
- The *subject* or *specific field* in which the research is to be carried out.
- The *provisional title* of the thesis.
- The *type of thesis* (full thesis or thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree).
- The name(s) of the *supervisor(s)*.
- An *abstract* of up to 200 words that sums up what the purpose of the research is, what the research question is, and how the research will be undertaken.

All proposals must have an completed **Ethics form** appended to them (see Appendix A for details).

## 2. Structure & Content

The following section outlines the main elements of a research proposal. This is *not* a template. You may organise your proposal and label the sections of your proposal in ways that are appropriate for your research.

### FIELD & TITLE

#### ***Field of research***

A statement of the field/discipline in which study is positioned e.g. Environmental Education, Education Leadership and Management, Higher Education . . .

#### ***Provisional title***

A working title, explaining what the research aims to do, capturing the nature and scope of the study.

### CONTEXT/CONCEPT/THEORY

General information regarding the research that will be undertaken:

- Situate the research, locating it within the ***contextual landscape***.
- Provide an overview of the ***conceptual focus*** of the research (eg leadership, education policy, social inclusion).
- Offer insight into the ***theoretical framework(s)*** or underpinnings informing the research. Make sure that such theory is discussed in relation to the proposed research.
- Declare the ***rationale/significance*** of the research, explaining why the research is being undertaken and why it is worth doing - what its *potential value* is.
- Provide evidence of wide and *critical engagement with the literature* in the field, including *current* literature and recent findings of other researchers, in justifying the potential contribution/niche of the research project.

### GOAL/QUESTIONS

Declaration of the ***research goal(s)/purpose***, making explicit what the research is aimed at achieving.

Articulation of the goal in the form of ***research question(s)***, focusing the study more specifically.

### RESEARCH DESIGN

The *methodological orientation or approach*, the *research method*, data-gathering *techniques/tools* and *processes* of data analysis.

- Speak to the *positioning of the researcher* and the implications of this for the research.
- Define the *research site*, the *participants* to be worked with, and the criteria for the selection of these.
- Demonstrate an awareness of the practical steps involved in the *research process*, including how the empirical aspect of the research will be piloted.
- Identify and justify intended *methods* and *tools* in terms of the overall design.
- Include issues of *validity*, including reliability if appropriate.
- Demonstrate internal methodological and theoretical *coherence*. The research design must be consistent with the research goal(s) and question(s).

## REFERENCES

Only works referred to in the proposal are cited in the *references*. References which the researcher intends to follow up on may be indicated. These could be signalled separately in the text.

The Education Faculty uses the American Psychological Association (APA) referencing system. Guidelines for referencing (as well as academic writing in general) can be found at on the Rhodes Education Faculty website.

## APPENDICES

Ethics form [**required** – see Appendix A]

Additional information can be attached as appendices but these should not be lengthy, for example time-frame, schedule, provisional table of contents.

## 3. Critical Readers

It is **STRONGLY** recommended that supervisors ask colleagues [ideally experts in the discipline/theory /methodology] including an external reviewer, to offer formative feedback on the proposal **PRIOR** to submission to the HDC. The following questions are suggested to guide the process of reviewing proposals.

With the increasing diversity of proposals that the Committee is engaging with, it is recognised that the reader needs to consider each proposal within and be sensitive to the different genres of the proposed projects (eg disciplinary context, research paradigm/methodology, theoretical framing, ontological orientation).

These questions are offered to inform review **PRIOR** to the HDC meeting:

### Field & title

Is the field clearly identified?

Does the title accurately reflect the intended study?

### Context/Concept/Theory

Is it appropriately **contextualized** – situated and substantiated?

Are the main **concepts** deliberated and substantiated?

Is it appropriately **theorised**?

Is the theory discussed in relation to the study?

Is the potential **value**/significance of the research articulated?

### Goal/Questions

Are they clear and explicit?

Are they attainable?

### Research Design

Is the **orientation** described and justified?

Is the **method** clearly described?

Are **data collection** techniques described and justified?

Are they appropriate to the **nature of the research** and the research question?

Are the **site** and **sample** described? Are **selection criteria** discussed?

Is there an awareness of the kinds of **data** that will be generated and how these might be **analysed**?

Are **validity** threats addressed?

Have **ethical issues** been addressed?  
Are potential shortcomings/**limitations** considered?

### References

Do they reflect the current thinking in the discipline and in research?  
Are seminal texts referred to?

**Suggestion:** Any comments regarding the above questions should be shared with the supervisor who would then pass them on to the scholar.

## 4. EHDC Criteria

EHDC members use a template on which to record their comments about proposals. This is attached as Appendix B.

## 5. Proposal Presentations

### [PhD candidates only]

A presentation of your proposal is required before you may submit your proposal to the EHDC. Your supervisor will inform the Chair of the EHDC that you are ready to do a presentation and a time will be scheduled for this. This should ideally fall within one of the scheduled PhD weeks or directly following an EHDC meeting. All Education Faculty members are invited as well as postgraduate scholars in education. Members of the EHDC are particularly urged to attend.

**Purpose:** The primary purpose of the presentation is for you to have the opportunity to communicate the *coherence* of your proposal to a supportive audience. It is therefore important that you prepare your presentation well, to demonstrate the *whole* project within the time frame given. This is not an assessment. The role of the audience and the EHDC is to ask you questions of clarification and suggest ways forward so that you may improve your proposal prior to submitting it to the EHDC.

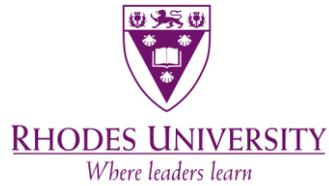
**Time:** One hour is allocated for each presentation session. This is made up of a 30 minute presentation and 30 minutes for questions, discussions and suggestions from audience participants. It is *important* that presentations do not exceed 30 minutes. You are likely to be stopped after 30 minutes even if you are only half way through what you planned. For this reason it is highly recommended that you do a run through of your presentation before and time yourself.

**Style and visual aids:** The way in which you present your proposal is up to you. Many scholars use a Powerpoint presentation and there is a data projector available for this. While the style of your presentation is your decision, it is important that your presentation communicates clearly the *logic* of your research proposal. You should avoid spending too much time on one section such as the theoretical framework at the expense of focusing on the research questions and methodology. Avoid slides that are too busy and keep your font size readable. Avoid unnecessary detail on slides. Remember that the key aim of the presentation is to enable you to receive feedback from the audience in terms of whether the various aspects of your proposal form a *coherent* and *consistent* whole. Thus your presentation should:

- Clearly identify the field and title
- Contextualize the study (provide conceptual/theoretical frameworks with rationale)
- Make clear and explicit the goals and research questions of the study
- Communicate clearly the research design (with justification and a sense of the time frame)
- Describe clearly the site and sample of the research

- Indicate how data will be generate and how analysis might proceed
- Address issues of validity, limitations and ethical considerations.

# Appendix A – Ethical Clearance



***Rhodes University***  
***FACULTY of EDUCATION***

***Guidelines for Ethical Research***  
***August 2014***

This document has been specifically developed for the  
Faculty of Education to work in alignment with the  
Rhodes University Ethical Standards.

This document offers some guidelines to help you ensure that your research meets these ethical  
standards.

A consideration of ethics is fundamental to all research.  
As a researcher you have a responsibility  
to ensure that your research is ethical.

## **Guiding ethical principles**

[Drawn from the draft RUESC Handbook 2014:19]

It is vital that the design of your research and therefore your proposal demonstrates how you will address the following ethical principles:

### ***Respect and dignity***

Researchers should:

- respect the autonomy and welfare of participants
- protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants
- respect the right of individuals to refuse to participate or withdraw from participation

### ***Transparency and honesty***

Researchers should:

- analyse and disclose potential risks and benefits to participants
- obtain informed consent from participants by briefing participants about the aims and implications for the research
- practice the principles of honesty, transparency and scrutiny, when communicating the research findings to the public and their peers

NB: In cases where the methodology necessitates concealment of information, the researcher should:

- ensure that the prospective academic, educational or applied value of the research project justifies this methodology
- investigate alternative methodologies that do not require the concealment of information
- ensure participants are informed of the reasons for such concealment

### ***Accountability and responsibility***

Researchers should:

- conduct their research in accordance with these principles
- conduct their research in accordance with codes of ethics of the research contexts and relevant professional associations
- disclose any conflicts of interest
- not misuse research for personal power or gain
- pay special attention to research which includes vulnerable participant
- pay attention to investigator and supervisor competence and responsibilities

### ***Integrity and academic professionalism***

Researchers should:

- attempt to practice non-partisanship and independence, conducting research that is either free from or explicitly discloses any political, racial, gendered, religious or other bias
- ensure that the methodology of their research project is thorough and academically sound in terms of relevance and scientific integrity.

## **Guidelines for engagement with ethical principles**

*While the following guidelines have been framed by the stated principles it is recognized that the principles are integrally related.*

### ***Respect and dignity***

Try to keep in mind that as a researcher, you are engaging in a professional relationship with your participants. You should do everything in your power to ensure that there is good communication and mutual trust between you.

Participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. They should be informed of this.

Participants have the right to remain anonymous. In many cases it is ethically appropriate not to reveal the research site and the names of the participants; pseudonyms should be used where necessary. In such cases, participants should be informed that the researcher/s will do their best not to reveal identities but that this cannot always be guaranteed.

When using recording equipment to collect data, there is a risk that participants' identities may be revealed and that their privacy may be compromised in unanticipated ways. Due thought must be given to this; participants must be informed of their rights and must give consent to the use of such equipment. Participants must also be informed of the purpose for their use and signed consent gained if you intend to show videos or use photos eg in seminars and/or conference presentations.

Data should be stored securely. As far as possible, data should be recorded in such a way that the identity of the participants remains confidential. If you have to share the data with anyone (e.g. someone who transcribes your tapes), you should obtain their assurance that it will remain confidential.

You should plan and execute your research well so that you are respectful of participants' time eg not conducting interviews during teaching time.

### ***Transparency and honesty***

A central principle of ethical research is that of *informed consent*. Informed consent means the following:

- Participants' have *voluntarily* agreed to be part of the research.
- Participants *understand* what they are agreeing to. They have been *informed* of the purposes of the research, why it is being undertaken, and the institution, which is overseeing it.

In order to ensure that participants' consent is voluntary and informed, a research protocol should be drawn up and signed by each participant. This protocol should be clearly written in a language that the participant understands. If the participant is not literate, the document should be read to him/her. An unsigned copy of the specific research project protocol should be included as an appendix to the thesis; the participant should be given a copy and the signed copies should be kept in your research archive.

There should be open communication between you and your research participants; the relationship should be one of partnership and trust.

Wherever possible data (e.g. interview transcripts) and interpretations should be shared with participants and negotiated if/as appropriate.

When feeding back to your participants it is important to do so in a clear and accessible manner.

### ***Accountability and responsibility***

Special care should be taken when researching children or adolescents (or other relatively powerless people). Permission must be obtained from the school (the principal and the SGB), and from the parents where minors are involved. In certain circumstances, you may need to get the permission of the Department of Education. The Department of Education [DoE] policy for research in schools should be adhered to.

You should be mindful of cultural, linguistic, religious, gendered and other significant differences, such as the power relationship between yourself and the participants, when you plan, conduct and report on your research.

### ***Integrity and academic professionalism***

Pay careful attention to the way you *represent people and situations* in your research. Examine your assumptions and perceptions and how these might influence aspects of the research process and its documentation.

Make every effort to ensure that your research findings are valid and that threats to validity have been taken into account.

In order to support issues of research validity, systematic and careful records should be kept in what is often called a *project archive*. "In principle, it should be possible to work backwards through the archive from the conclusions of the research report to the raw data and thereby be able to verify the conclusions" (Bassey 1995: 16). This is known as creating an *audit trail*.

Data must be authentic ie it must not be fabricated, manipulated or misreported (e.g. you may not leave out data which does not fit in with your analysis).

Show respect for academic work and ideas through appropriate acknowledgement of others' work and ideas. (Refer to Rhodes University Plagiarism Policy)

In qualitative research, be particularly careful about how you choose *direct quotations* from your data in the research. Ensure that they are representative. Keep in mind that although such quotes make a case study more interesting, you are *selecting* them, taking them out of the original context in which the participant uttered the words, and placing them in a context created by you, the researcher.

Conduct yourself in such a way that you do not jeopardize the chances of other researchers working in the same community.

If you encounter any ethical problems in your research, discuss these as a matter of urgency with your supervisor, record them together with your reflections and proposed solutions, in, for example, your research journal. You should then discuss this in your thesis under the heading, 'Limitations of the research'. For example, you might be a principal carrying out research in your own school. Although the participants in your research gave their informed consent and you made every effort to ensure that they felt free to say 'no', you might still feel that your position of authority exerted a degree of pressure on them to agree. You would need to acknowledge this as a limitation in your research.

### **Ethical Clearance**

For any piece of research it is important that ethical clearance is sought from the appropriate bodies.

In the case of Rhodes University, it is important that your research receives clearance from the relevant departmental or faculty ethics committee. If your research involves university staff members you also need to obtain permission from the Director of Human Resources and if it involves university students you also need to obtain permission from the Registrar.

**Please use the following form to apply for approval from the ethics committee.**

**RU FACULTY OF EDUCATION: ETHICAL APPROVAL APPLICATION**

**IMPORTANT:** The following form needs to be completed by the researcher and submitted with their research proposal to the Education Higher Degrees Committee. The details to which this form relates should also be evident in the text of the proposal.

**GENERAL PARTICULARS**

<b>MEd</b> <b>(Half thesis)</b>		<b>MEd</b> <b>(Full thesis)</b>		<b>PhD</b>		<b>Other:</b> <b>Please specify</b>	
------------------------------------	--	------------------------------------	--	------------	--	--	--

TITLE OF RESEARCH:

DEPARTMENT/INSTITUTE:

DATE: [Submission to EHDC]

RESEARCHER:

SUPERVISOR/S:

**ETHICS**

NB: You must read the Faculty of Education Ethics Guideline *prior* to completing this form. Please indicate below how your research supports the indicated ethical principle:

*Respect and dignity*

*Transparency and honesty*

*Accountability and responsibility*

*Integrity and academic professionalism*

Signature (researcher)

Signature (supervisor)

Date:

Place:

