

**RECOMMENDED LAYOUT FOR MASTERS AND DOCTORAL DEGREE OUTLINES FOR PROSPECTIVE APPLICANTS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS.**

**ALL PROSPECTIVE APPLICANTS ARE REQUIRED TO READ THIS DOCUMENT IN ITS ENTIRETY BEFORE EMBARKING ON THE OUTLINE. FAILURE TO PROVIDE THE OUTLINE IN THIS STRUCTURE MAY AFFECT THE OUTCOME OF YOUR APPLICATION.**

<b><u>RECOMMENDED STRUCTURE OF PROPOSAL OUTLINE</u></b>	<b><u>RECOMMENDED STRUCTURE OF PROPOSAL OUTLINE</u></b>
<b><u>Quantitative study</u></b>	<b><u>Qualitative study</u></b>
<p><b>Chapter 1:</b> Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1 Context and Background</li> <li>1.2 Problem statement</li> <li>1.3 Research objective(s)</li> <li>1.4 Hypothesis</li> <li>1.5 Significance of the study</li> <li>1.6 Outline of the study</li> </ul> <p><b>Chapter 2:</b> Literature review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1 Theoretical literature review</li> <li>2.2 Empirical literature review</li> </ul> <p><b>Chapter 3:</b> Research methodology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1 Model specification and estimation technique</li> <li>3.2 Discussion of variables used</li> <li>3.3 Data and data sources</li> </ul> <p><b>List of references</b></p>	<p><b>Chapter 1:</b> Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1 Context and Background</li> <li>1.2 Problem statement</li> <li>1.3 Research objective(s)</li> <li>1.4 Research questions</li> <li>1.5 Significance of the study</li> <li>1.6 Outline of the study</li> </ul> <p><b>Chapter 2:</b> Literature review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1 Theoretical literature review</li> <li>2.2 Empirical Literature Review</li> </ul> <p><b>Chapter 3:</b> Research methodology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1 Detailed description of Qualitative Research methodology adopted</li> <li>3.2 Analysing and discussion of content</li> <li>3.3 Synthesizing content and/or data</li> </ul> <p><b>List of references</b></p>

## Assessment Criteria for OUTLINE

### 1. Research orientation

- ✚ Background goes from general to specific.
- ✚ Clarity of problem identification.
- ✚ Formulation of problem statement.
- ✚ Identified achievable and sensible research objectives and/or research questions.
- ✚ Clarity of rationale for the study.

### 2. Literature review

- ✚ The clarity and comprehension of main theories and debates.
- ✚ Have referenced key authors in the field.
- ✚ Critical analysis is applied to literature.
- ✚ Appropriateness of synthesis of literature study.
- ✚ Good logical flow and sustenance of arguments.
- ✚ Sufficiency of number of sources.
- ✚ Quality of sources used.

### 3. Research methodology

- ✚ Justification of research approach and design is convincing and in line with objectives.
- ✚ Used academic sources to justify methodological choices.
- ✚ Research design (structure) is suitable and clearly defended.
- ✚ The detail of the research method (e.g. data gathering, model specification) has been adequately described.
- ✚ Appropriateness of proposed data analysis methods.
- ✚ The abstract a good synthesis of the introduction, problem statement, methodology, findings and recommendations.

### 4. Technical requirements

- ✚ Does the research outline contain a title page?
- ✚ Does the research outline contain table of contents, list of figures and tables?
- ✚ Is the outline free from spelling mistakes or grammatical errors?
- ✚ Have you made use of appropriate referencing styles?
- ✚ Have you properly, consistently and accurately referenced?
- ✚ Is the reference list complete?

## COMPONENTS OF THE OUTLINE SECTIONS

### 1. INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

*“This is why my topic is worthwhile studying”*

In this section, you introduce the broad topic of your intended research by placing it in a wider context and giving it some background. It establishes the context of the research by summarizing current understanding and background information about the topic.

For example if the topic is:

The Debt Crisis in ... (Greece, Portugal, Italy, Spain or Ireland): Origins, Fall-out and Possible Lessons for South Africa.

In this section, you thus provide some context and background to the European debt crisis, particularly as it manifested in the country you are going to study.

Essential and relevant background information highlighting the intended area of research will make the problem statement of your research more lucid than would have been the case otherwise. It clears the ground for the problem statement (see next section).

The introduction thus serves the purpose of *leading the reader from a general subject area to a particular field of research.*

### 2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

*“These are the aspects of my topic which are, in my view, not yet adequately understood”*

The aim of this section is to arrive at a problem statement, which relates to the field of research as introduced in section 1.

The problem statement explains why you think your research is important and potentially valuable. Give arguments and evidence to that effect.

### 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

*“This is what I want to investigate in order to address the research problem I have identified”*

In this section, you state how you propose to *operationalise your intended research.* You tell us what exactly you want to do in order to address the research problem. This should be spilt into overall objective and the sub objectives (there should be about 3 or 4).

When describing your objectives use operational verbs like “explain”, “investigate”, “find out”, “analyse”, “evaluate”, “consider”, or “explore”. Your study objectives must be clear and well-articulated.

You could start with a main overall objective and then move to specific issues. In stating your research objectives always remember that they should be specific, measurable (if your study is quantitative), attainable, realistic and time bound.

#### 4. RESEARCH QUESTION / HYPOTHESIS

*“This is what I hypothesise might be a way of solving the problem”*

The problem statement defines and presents the issues in order to frame specific research questions or hypotheses. The questions or hypotheses *offer possible solutions to the problem as stated in the problem statement. They are just an opinion that may be true or false.* The whole point of your research will be to establish their truth or falsehood. When your research is quantitative, a research question or hypothesis will typically specify an assumed relationship amongst variables as well as the direction of causation. For example if the statement is about two variables, Y and X, the hypothesis states the relationship between Y and X; e.g.  $Y = F(X)$  and makes explicit the assumed direction of causation.

Sometimes the nature of your research is such that it is *not feasible* to formulate specific research questions/hypotheses, namely *when your research is aimed at gaining deeper understanding of the research problem without necessarily seeking to provide any solutions to it.* In that case, your research objectives will suffice and you can skip research questions/hypotheses.

#### 5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

*“This is why my research is relevant and important”*

Here you indicate what you expect to discover and why you think this discovery is meaningful. It must provide an answer to the “so what?” question. Indicate, where possible, who may benefit from the research.

#### 6. OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

*“This is how I intend to structure my research”*

Under this heading, you explain in what order you propose to discuss the various relevant issues. For that purpose, you need to list the various sections of your article and give a short (one-sentence) outline of the main topic of each section. You may state something like “Section 1 will discuss .... In section 2 it will be investigated ... Section 3 provides an analysis of ....” and so forth. Try to explain the logic behind the order in which you propose to discuss things.

#### 7. LITERATURE REVIEW

*“This is what other people have found who have done similar research”*

Under this heading, you provide a literature review of *the particular field of research, which addresses the same*, or a similar research problem, pursues the same or similar research objectives or uses the same or similar research methods.

The basic objectives of a literature survey are to show that

- a. you have acquired a good working knowledge of your topic, and that you have consulted the major works dealing with your topic
- b. your intended study will add something new and fresh.

Here are some hints to help you write a good literature survey:

- Use relevant literature
  - If there are thought leaders (“gurus”) in your field, be sure to discuss their contributions.
- Quote literature to make and support key points.
- Preferably, use recent literature not older than 5 years.
- Be sure to include the latest developments in the field.
- If the meaning of key concepts is not common knowledge, provide a definition and explanation.
- Do not merely provide a summary of ideas but also analyse, compare, interpret and contrast the literature reviewed.
  - All this should culminate in a *credible synthesis of the ideas*, which is how you demonstrate your grasp of the topic.
  - In other words, out of all the concepts, ideas, facts and prior findings mentioned in the literature, select the most relevant ones and order them into a logical structure of your own making.

As noted, the main aims are (a) *to show that you have already obtained a solid grasp of your topic* and (b) *to identify a gap in the literature*, which your research seeks to fill.

## 8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*“This is how I am going to do my research”*

In this section, you specify the research method that you will use to achieve your objectives, answer your research questions or validate your hypotheses. Your methodology should speak clearly to the research problem that you identified.

There are two options between:

1. *Quantitative research*, in which case you would use some econometric technique. If you choose this type of research, you would need to indicate:
  - the particular econometric technique(s) you envisage to employ
  - how the chosen technique(s) is (are) appropriate for your purposes

- what model(s) constructed by other researchers you will be using and how you will be adapting it (them), and
- the data set you want to use and how reliable this set is likely to be
- A priori expectation underpinned by theoretical and empirical literature.

2. *Qualitative research*, in which case historical facts are systematically interpreted and analysed. In this type of research, you need to:

- examine changes over time in economic institutions, conditions, practices, policies, etcetera
- access statistical sources, archival material, newspapers, and government documentation
- determine patterns from data series such as income data, price data, expenditure data and suggest causation
- sophisticated versions of qualitative (descriptive-analytical) research align with research type 1 in as much as time-series analysis and other techniques are employed

## 9. LIST OF REFERENCES

You should use the “Augmented Harvard method of referencing” as explained in the Unisa CEMS Librarians 2014 *Guidelines for Referencing Source Material for Assignments, Articles, Research Reports, Theses and Dissertations*.

This referencing guide is available at:

<http://www.unisa.ac.za/library/referencingsource>.

## 10. NUMBER OF OUTLINE PAGES

The department recommends that all outlines should be between 10 and 20 pages. Application with outlines that do not follow this recommendation and or does not include all the sections outlined above will be considered incomplete.