

# Chapter 07

## WRITING SYNOPSIS OR PROTOCOL

Synopsis, protocol or proposal is a pre-requisite for initiation of research work. It must contain title of the project, its significance and the hypothesis to be tested or objectives of the study. A review of literature is essential to provide status of information on the work already done on this or similar topics. Methodology must be given along with how the data will be subjected to statistical analysis.

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

Synopsis or protocol is the plan of work or an outline of the research proposal one intends to undertake, especially for a postgraduate degree – Master's or Doctorate. Those aspiring for a Fellowship of the College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan (FCPS) are also required to prepare a proposal (Protocol) before initiating research in their field of study. A synopsis serves several purposes. It establishes the structure of the research and identifies areas where research is required. It may also form the basis of a cost calculation.

A well-written and well-presented thesis or dissertation is only possible when it is well planned. This means making a thorough preliminary study of the selected problem. This entails going through work previously done on this and similar topics and arranging the material into a logical sequence, which allows understanding the significance and objectives of the project. There may be a need to conduct preliminary investigation to ensure that the project has been well conceived. The subject matter should be reduced to the minimum necessary for clarity. The relevant theoretical, experimental and field facts should be presented concisely. The objectives that follow from the review of literature should be logically developed.

## 7.2 COMPONENTS OF A SYNOPSIS

A synopsis is normally prepared under the guidance of a supervisor. It must include the following:

- Title
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Review of Literature
- Materials and Methods
- References

### 7.2.1 TITLE

There are different approaches to the selection of a title for research work. First, the supervisor may recommend the student to work on his/her on-going research project. Secondly, the student may desire to work in an area of his/her own interest. Thirdly, the project can be selected keeping in view the research priorities of the department and research facilities available in the institution. It is, however, advisable that the supervisor, keeping in view interest and aptitude of the student, should allocate topic of significance to development of the discipline or the country. In short, the topic should be problem oriented, eye catching and focused on the major objectives of the study.

Whatever is the selection procedure, the project must be of a nature that has some academic, industrial or economic significance. The title must be clearly worded and explain the nature of work to be done. Avoid using such phrases as "Studies on," "Investigations in," "Effect of," and other such expressions.

### 7.2.2 ABSTRACT

The abstract should be short (100 to 200 words), self-contained and explicit. It should very briefly contain significance of the project and set out objectives of the study. It should also provide approach to tackle the problem.

### 7.2.3 INTRODUCTION

The introduction briefly defines general problem area, describes background of the project and states importance of the specific problem under study. It should be easy to read, understand and free of irrelevant material, having a logical presentation. The introduction should conclude at the hypothesis to be tested or objectives of the study. The introduction should describe briefly the research strategy.



It should include need for the study in relation to its purpose or objectives, defining its importance or applicability of the results to economic, social, cultural, institutional and/or academic development.

The purpose of an introduction is to set the proposed research work in context and to provide sufficient background information to make the material in the main text easily understandable. If a report is highly specialized, or if the background material is fragmentary, then a longer introduction may be necessary. The introduction should summarize the following points: what is known; why the investigation should be undertaken and how the results are to be presented in the thesis. The objectives of the investigation should be stated formally, together with any hypotheses that are to be tested.

#### **7.2.4 REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Research work published during the past 5-10 years should be reported in this section. The references collected must have direct relevance to the topic under review. It should be written in a story form, critically analyzing and evaluating the work. The review must be pertinent to the topic and should point out the achievements as well as deficiencies. It should describe the progress in the field. Relevant literature, especially from Pakistan and your own institution, should be briefly reviewed citing only pertinent references.

#### **7.2.5 MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This section should contain details of materials to be used for research and brief description of the methods and equipment to be employed. It should be written in the future tense. This section should include the study design, research instruments such as a questionnaire, criteria for subject (patient) selection, procedure and statistical tests for data analysis. The materials and methods should be in accordance with the purposes of the study and clearly described.

The experimental design is an important aspect of the project. It should be such that it can be completed within the time frame given by the institution. The statistician must be consulted at this stage to find out which statistical programme would be applicable to the data.

#### **7.2.6 REFERENCES**

This is the last part of a synopsis where all the references cited are listed. The style for listing references varies from institution to institution. Most universities in Pakistan follow the Harvard system, while College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan prefers the



---

Vancouver system. Only literature cited in the text must be written in the list of references providing necessary details for easy retrieval. The details required are name(s) of the author(s), year of publication, title of the article or book, journal name, volume, issue number and inclusive pages. In case of books and proceedings, publishers name and location (city) are required in the reference (for details please see Chapter 11).

### **7.3 SIZE AND FORMAT**

There is no upper limit on the length of a Synopsis. Normally about four A4/Letter pages typed on 1.5 spaces should suffice. The preferable font is Arial or Times New Roman and 12 point size is fine.

The format varies from institution to institution. In general, the title page should include name of the institution, name of the department, title of the degree, title of the synopsis, name of the student, registration number and name of the supervisor. Besides these, other information required by the authorities may also be needed. The Abstract should start on the title page. A sample of the proforma for synopsis submission at the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad is given in Fig 7.1.

### **7.4 SUBMISSION**

When a draft synopsis has been completed it must be submitted to the supervisor. It is unlikely that the first draft will prove completely satisfactory and some changes will usually have to be incorporated. Once the supervisor and the supervisory committee approve the synopsis, it needs to be submitted, normally through the head of department to the approving authorities (Director Advanced Studies or Dean of Graduate Studies). Once approved, the student can proceed to carry out the research as proposed in the synopsis.