

**POSTGRADUATE WRITING
WEEK 9
CONCEPT PAPERS
DR. SUSAN MWANGI
ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY**

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

In our previous class, we discussed about integrating digital tools for research. We established that

- Digital tools enhance every stage of the research process.
- Strategic and ethical integration of technology is crucial.
- Disclosure of AI usage is essential to maintain academic integrity.

We also discussed the purpose of various digital tools in research as well as how these tools are applied for different stages of the research process such as the literature review, data collection, analysis, and citation management. We also looked at real world scenarios in the use of social media and AI in research. Finally, we have looked at the ethical considerations and digital literacy required in using digital tools. In today's lesson, we shall discuss about concept papers also known as concept notes in research. We shall define what concept notes are and why they are important in the research process.

INTENDED LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Define what a concept paper in research is.
2. Identify different sections of a concept paper.
3. Discuss the purpose of a concept paper when carrying out research.

DEFINITION OF A RESEARCH CONCEPT NOTE

- A research concept note is like a blueprint, it does not contain all the details but provides enough structure to get constructive feedback and greenlights before building the full project.
- A research concept note is required at the early planning stages of a research project, especially when you need to communicate or get approval for your research idea before developing a full proposal.

- A Research Concept Paper is a brief document outlining the idea, purpose, and approach for a research project—often used for proposals, grants, or thesis preparation.
- A research concept note is not the full paper, rather, it is a plan that should convince others of one's ideas.

KEY SECTIONS OF A RESEARCH CONCEPT NOTE

1. Working Title

- The working title is placed on the cover page together with other institutional details such as name of institution, name of programme, student's name or admission number, date and any other details as guided by your institution.
- When selecting a title, researchers usually begin by selecting a broad area and gradually narrowing it down to a manageable scope.

- As a researcher, keep an open mind in order to adjust and re-adjust the topic in light of new information. Flexibility is important at this stage because it will enable you to tailor the work to fit the intended purpose. For example, if one wanted to investigate the effects of social media on university students' mental health, it may be necessary to narrow down the topic to specific university students, for example those in a particular area or jurisdiction.
- In selecting a viable research topic, do not ignore your personal interests, background and experiences. Avoid vague and overly broad titles, a good title captures the essence of your research in a concise and informative way.

1. Background of the Study

- The Background of a study provides the context within which the research will be carried out. This section provides a justification for conducting the research. It also provides a summary of what the research aims to achieve.
- The main purpose of a background of the study is to introduce the reader to one's specific area of study. A good background of the study requires a review of the available literature and an organized presentation of this information, possibly in a chronological order or in well-organized themes.

3. Research Problem/Statement of the Problem

- A research problem can be defined as a specific issue or gap in literature that should be addressed by the current study. The process of identifying, selecting and defining a research problem leads to the writing of a problem statement.
- A problem statement explains an argument and details why a researcher considers a particular research problem to be of importance. Writing a concise problem statement requires good identification, selection and definition of the research problem.
- A well-written problem statement serves to convince the reader that the area of research is indeed pertinent and deserves attention.

4. Objectives and/or Research Questions

- Research objectives are specific aims arising directly from the purpose of the study.
- They are statements of intended specific outcomes that specify more directly what the researcher is going to do. Research objectives ultimately influence factors such as the research methodology, sample size, data collection and data analysis.
- They ensure that the research is focused and that there is a clear path through the research and writing process.



5. Significance of the Study

- The significance of the study conveys to the reader the reason why the proposed research is important. This may be an academic supervisor assessing your concept note for the purpose of approval for you to begin writing your proposal.
- In this case, it is important to ensure that the Significance of your study is clearly articulated and that it clearly outlines the contribution that your study will make to scholarship, to the industry and to other stakeholders.

6. Literature Review including the main theories

- Literature review can be defined as a systematic, analytical and critical assessment of what has been written by scholars on a particular subject matter.
- A literature review is necessary in order for the research to understand his/her area of study, identify similar studies that have been carried out by other scholars, to review the findings of these studies and to identify the theories that have been used in these studies.
- In this section, provide a preliminary literature review that provides an overview of relevant studies and gaps.

7. Proposed Research Methodology

- A research methodology is basically the construction plan of research. It is the framework of the process used to conduct research. It includes the specific procedures or techniques to be used to identify, select, process and analyze information about a particular topic.
- Research methodology provides the justification for using a particular approach and the rationale behind the choice of the research method applied or used.
- Research methodology simply refers to the practical “how” of any given piece of research. More specifically, it is about how a researcher systematically designs a study to ensure valid and reliable results that address the research aims and objectives.

8. Expected Outcomes

- A brief discussion on expected results or research outcomes should be provided here based on the proposed research methodology to be used.
- Expected outcomes will also be determined by the research approach to be used, whether it will be qualitative, quantitative or a mixed-methods research.

9. Timeline

- Discuss the timeline of your research allocating adequate time for each stage of the research process based on the amount of work required for each section.
- For example, you may allocate about 3-4 weeks for the literature review while the data collection and analysis may take more time due to the amount of work required.
- For the purpose of planning, it is important to have an idea of how long the entire process may take.

10. Budget Estimate

- Creating a research budget involves careful planning to ensure that all expenses related to your project are anticipated and justified.
- The research budget should include equipment and software, personnel expenses, travel and fieldwork expenses, literature resources, dissemination and reporting and contingencies among others.
- It is important to justify each item in the budget and to be realistic when quoting the amounts, avoid overestimates or underestimates.

10. References

Provide a list of the key sources that you have already consulted. These are the academic sources that you have already cited in your paper.

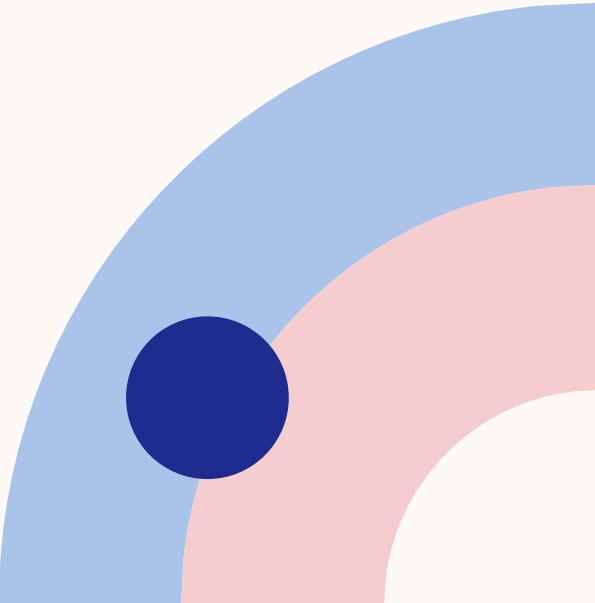
Whether you are using APA, MLA or another referencing style, remember to be consistent in the style that you are using both for your in-text citations and the reference list.

THE PURPOSE OF A RESEARCH CONCEPT NOTE

There are several reasons why you may need to write a research concept note:

1. Before Writing a Full Research Proposal

Before writing a full research proposal, you may be required to get preliminary approval from a supervisor, research committee, or academic adviser. The concept note provides an opportunity for you to outline your research idea in a brief format for the purpose of such approval. The concept note is used for the purpose of presenting the research plan for approval. On this basis, the researcher is advised on whether the topic is viable or not.



2. When Applying for Research Funding or Grants Many grant agencies or institutions ask for a short concept note before inviting full proposals. The concept note helps funders to screen projects and decide which ones are worth investing in. A concept note acts serves as an initial document in grant applications or fellowship programs as it demonstrates the importance and potential impact of the research.

3. During Collaborative Project Planning

During collaborative project planning, the concept note can be shared with potential partners or co-researchers in order to present one's research idea. This is particularly helpful in cases of multi-institution or interdisciplinary projects.

4. To Pitch a Research Idea to Stakeholders

A concept note is also used to convince decision-makers such as donors, NGOs, or community leaders of the project's value and relevance.

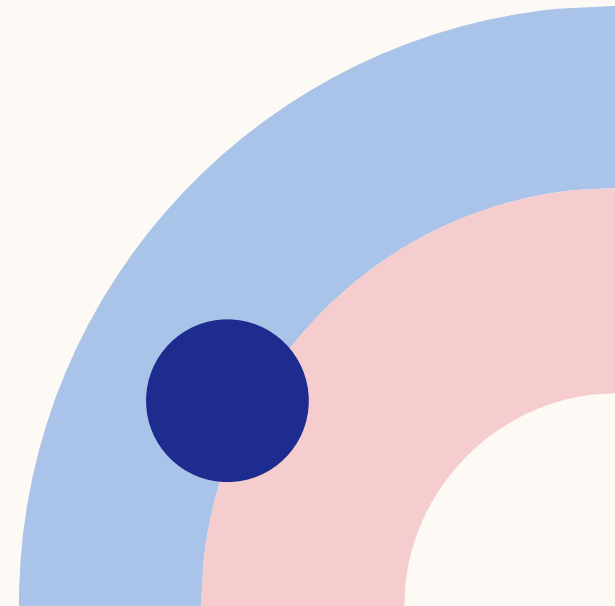
5. In Institutional or Departmental Approval Processes

Universities or research bodies may require a concept note before granting ethics clearance or allocating resources.

CHALLENGES IN WRITING A RESEARCH CONCEPT NOTE

Writing a research concept note, while useful, comes with several challenges, especially for new researchers. These challenges often stem from the need to be concise, clear, and persuasive in a limited space.

The following are some of the challenges that one may encounter:

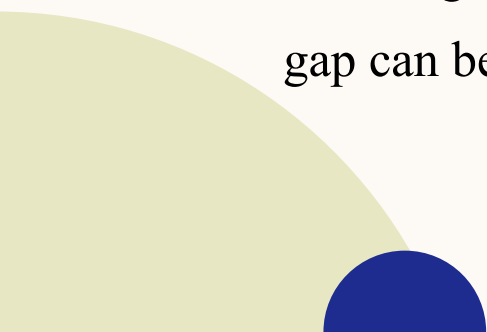
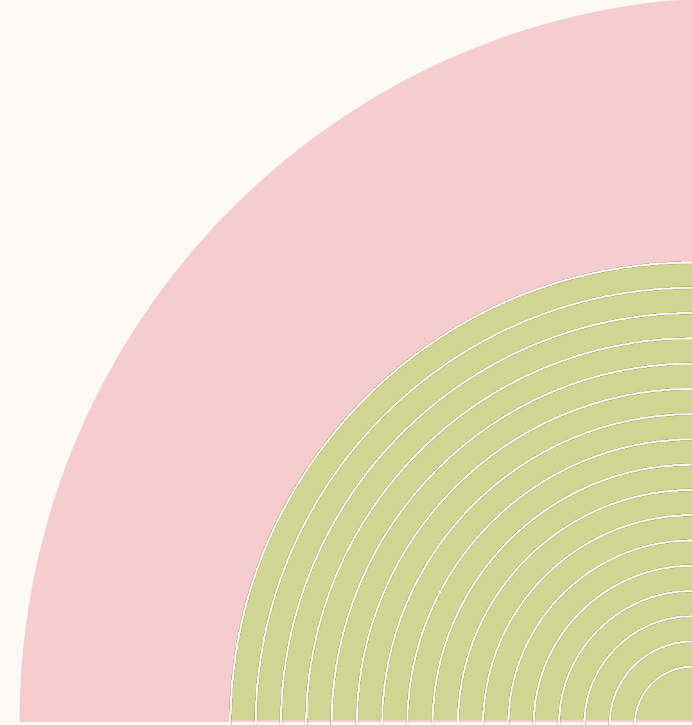


1. Being Clear Yet Concise

- A concept note is usually only a few pages long.
- It must communicate your entire research idea, problem, methodology, and significance without going into full detail.
- Challenge: Striking the balance between brevity and depth.

2. Defining a Precise Research Problem

- Researchers often start with broad interests rather than specific problems.
- Challenge: Narrowing down a topic to a focused, researchable question or gap can be difficult.



3. Limited Knowledge of Existing Literature

- Without a full literature review, it is difficult to know if your idea is original or if similar work already exists.
- Challenge: Supporting your idea without having done deep research yet.

4. Unclear Objectives and Methods

- Beginners often struggle to write specific, measurable objectives and choose the appropriate methodological approach.
- Challenge: Proposing methods that are feasible and align with your goals.

5. Weak Justification or Significance

- Many concept notes fail to clearly state why the research matters, who it benefits, or what it contributes.
- Challenge: Making a compelling case for relevance and impact in limited words.

6. Lack of Experience with Academic Language

- Using vague, casual, or wordy language can undermine the concept note's professional quality.
- Challenge: Writing in a formal, academic tone while keeping it accessible.

7. Insufficient Feedback

- Researchers may submit their concept note without getting constructive review, leading to rejection or major revisions.
- Challenge: Knowing how and where to seek useful feedback.

SUMMARY

- In our lesson today, we have discussed what a research concept note/paper is and the key sections of a concept note which include the working title, the background of the study, the research problem, the objectives of the study, the significance of the study, the literature review, the proposed methodology, the expected outcomes, the timeline, the estimated budget and the references.
- We have also discussed the purpose of a concept note which includes getting preliminary approval, applying for grants, for research collaboration purposes and for the sake of ethics clearance. Finally, we have looked at some of the challenges that one may encounter when developing concept notes.



REFERENCES

Ajuoga, M., Echaune, M., Maiyo, J., Mwangi, S., Odek, A., Kipkenei, S. Awour, D., &

Andiema, N. (2023). *Social Science in the New Era*. Aura Publishers.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods*

Approaches (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lipowski, E. (2008). Developing great research questions. *American Journal of Health*

System Pharmacy, 65 (17).



THANK YOU