

CONCEPT PAPER GUIDELINES AND QUALIFYING EXAM RUBRIC

Description

A concept paper is a 20-25 double-spaced page paper (excluding title page, abstract, references and appendices) required of all school leader PhD students seeking candidacy status, in which a doctoral student introduces the concept/topic that they would like to investigate for the dissertation. The concept paper is a requirement for a student to complete and will be submitted to be graded as the Qualifying Exam. A passing score on the Qualifying Exam is required to continue progressing from student to candidate status in the PhD program. The concept paper is most often completed at or near the end of required coursework. A prospective dissertation chair's consent and the Qualifying Exam application form (see School Leaders Policy and Procedures for Qualifying Exams) must be completed and submitted **prior** to submitting a completed concept paper to the School Leaders faculty for assessment.

Concept Paper Section Descriptions

Introduction. This beginning section introduces the reader to what is to come, i.e., the major sections covered in the paper in the order they appear. Do not use a heading for this part of the concept paper.

1. **Background and Context.** Set the stage for your proposed study. Discuss why the research is needed. This usually includes a brief overview of research previously completed on the topic or what is already known. The section concludes with what has not been done or is still needed.
2. **The Problem Statement.** This section should end with a clear and precise statement of the problem. There are multiple ways to approach this section. Considerations could include: (1) current gaps between the ideal situation and what the real situation currently is (2) a brief projection of the potential consequences of the problem if it is not addressed (3) potential innovative ways for addressing the problem. Be sure to restate the problem statement at or near the end of this section. This allows the Background of the Problem to become a great segue into the next section, the Purpose Statement.
3. **Purpose Statement.** Write the purpose statement for the study in a logical, explicit manner. Indicate the research design and address the targeted aspects of the problem (e.g., factors, variables, etc.) that will be examined in the study. The purpose statement is usually brief and concise. Limit extraneous wording and only include those aspects that are contained in your research questions. The aspects of the problem found in the purpose statement must show up in your research questions and the aspects of the problem found in your research questions must also show up in your purpose statement. Consult resources such as Creswell's scripts for writing a purpose statement for qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).
4. **Research Questions and/or Hypotheses.** Research questions are directly tied to the purpose and must reflect elements in the purpose statement. They should be specific, unambiguously stated, and unbiased. Note hypotheses that are predictions about outcomes of relationships among variables. They can be stated positively or negatively (null hypotheses). Ensure alignment across the study's purpose statement and the research questions and hypotheses.
5. **Conceptual or Theoretical Framework** (if appropriate). A conceptual framework draws on theory, research, and experience. It examines the relationship among concepts, constructs, ideas, and variables that serve as the basis for the development, analysis, findings, and discussion of the proposed study. A theoretical framework provides selected findings from earlier empirical studies which will undergird the

proposed analysis and discussion of the findings. When appropriate, a graphic depiction of the proposed conceptual or theoretical framework should be included.

6. **Significance of the Study.** Address the benefits that may be derived from doing the study, thereby reaffirming the research purpose. What might the study contribute? This is sometimes referred to as the “so what” of the study. This section should detail the study’s importance, possible contributions, and what it adds to the literature.
7. **Review of Literature.** Situate the study in the context of existing research pertaining to the topic ensuring you include findings from earlier studies that agree and disagree with your proposed thesis. Present a synthesis of empirical literature according to relevant themes or variables and justify how the study addresses a gap or extends the extant literature. Focus on the most relevant and seminal research informing the study. Briefly describe the literature you intend to synthesize for the dissertation including how it will be organized. Provide an introductory paragraph which includes the headings and topics in the order that they will show up. This “order” should be logical and funneling (e.g., past to present, macro to micro, etc.).
8. **Methodology** The Methodology section should present a rich discussion of the chosen methodology (Qualitative, Quantitative, or Mixed) and why it is the most suitable approach. It should include the epistemological and philosophical foundations from which it is derived. It should outline the research design, sample and site, data collection, and analysis to be used. Consider the following:
 - **Research Design and Methods** describes the design strategy chosen for the study (descriptive, inferential, narrative, case study, phenomenological, etc.), the research setting (site of the study), the sample (site and participants and criteria for inclusion), intended methods to be used for the study such as data collection procedures, data sources and types, instrumentation.
 - **Sample** describes the site and participant selection (where, who and how many). An initial criterion to be used to identify prospective participants should be demonstrated.
 - **Data Collection** describes the methods which will be used to generate data (interviews, observations, document analysis) or the instrumentation procedures used to collect data (e.g., mining existing databases, surveys). Consider:
 - Quantitative - Instruments/Procedures
 - Qualitative – Interviews, Observations, Document Analyses, Surveys
 - **Data Analysis:** Discuss analysis techniques to be used (it is understood it may be early to be precise).
9. **Positionality of the Researcher.** Explicitly state relevant assumptions, beliefs, and/or biases (if applicable), including relationship to the research site, the problem under investigation, and/or the participants.
10. **Limitations and Delimitations.** Define and state for both.
11. **Definitions.** Define key and relevant terminology, if needed. Use citations for all sources.
12. **Timeline.** Provide a proposed timeline for Dissertation Proposal Defense.
13. **References.** A reference list (no specified length).

References

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.

SCORING RUBRIC

4 = Exceeds Requirement, 3 = Meets Requirement, 2 = Needs Improvement, 1 = Needs Significant Improvement, 0 = Does Not Exist

ELEMENT/ASPECT	CRITERIA	GRADE	ASPECT TOTAL SCORE	REVIEWER COMMENTS
Relevance of the proposal to educational leadership.	A clear focus on educational administration and leadership issues, school governance, policies, and/or theories.	/ 4	/ 4	
Rational for conducting the study.	The background and context of study were clearly introduced.	/ 4	/ 12	
	A clear and significant problem/gap was identified.	/ 4		
	A concise problem statement was included.	/ 4		
Clarity of the purpose or aim of the study.	The purpose statement was clear, included the primary factors/variables found in the research questions, and remained consistent throughout the concept paper.	/ 4	/ 4	
Appropriateness of research questions	Research questions (RQs) are directly tied to the purpose and are appropriate for the proposed methodology.	/ 4	/ 12	
	RQs are specific enough to answer thoroughly.	/ 4		
	RQs are researchable and feasible to answer within the timeframe and practical constraints.	/ 4		

ELEMENT/ASPECT	CRITERIA	GRADE	ASPECT TOTAL SCORE	REVIEWER COMMENTS
Anchoring of proposal content to relevant scholarly literature.	Primary, recent, and seminal relevant sources from scholarly journals were included.	/ 4	/ 12	
	Literature review is well organized by theme or subtopic, from broad to narrow and flows well.	/ 4		
	Synthesizes findings across studies and compares and contrasts different perspectives or debates in the literature.	/ 4		
Appropriateness of the theoretical perspectives/conceptual framework.	Aligned with the purpose of the study.	/ 4	/ 12	
	Provided the theoretical and methodological bases for the development of the study and link to data analyses.	/ 4		
	A graphic of the model included, showing the relationships between concepts, ideas, or variables to be studied.	/ 4		
Appropriateness of the methods, including analytical strategies.	Methodological type and research design are appropriate for answering the research questions.	/ 4	/ 28	
	Provided a clear description of:			
	○the research setting (as appropriate)	/ 4		
	○the sample and site (with criteria for inclusion in the study)	/ 4		
	○methods of data collection (sources and types)	/ 4		
	○proposed data analysis strategies	/ 4		
	○limitations and delimitations (defined and examples provided)	/ 4		
	○role of the researcher /positionality and the potential impact on the study	/ 4		

ELEMENT/ASPECT	CRITERIA	GRADE	ASPECT TOTAL SCORE	REVIEWER COMMENTS
Quality of writing.	• Reader's ease of comprehension from author's proper use of grammar and correct sentence construction. Clarity, cogency, and alignment are present throughout the paper.	/ 4	/ 12	
	• Synthesis rather than summarization is used most often.	/ 4		
	• Appropriate formatting and use of punctuation; proper voice/tense & in-text referencing; and a comprehensive reference list format ALL which adhere to APA guidelines	/ 4		
Significance/Implications	Shows a clear and realistic understanding of the possible implications of the study.	/ 4	/ 4	
TOTAL SCORE:			/ 100	

Passing Score: 75 Points (average of 3 or better on each item assessed)