Proposal title

Student name

Student number

Course code

Study programme

Date

General remark:

Imagine that you are writing this for a funding agency: why would they pay you to do this research? This means that they should be convinced that

* This is an important topic -> good problem statement (especially the first, general part) that makes clear that you are going to address an important problem
* This is going to yield new information -> good and precise problem statement (especially the latter part where you explain the knowledge gap that you are going to address) that makes clear that your research fills a void in our current knowledge
* This will result in a useful research report -> clear and precise objective and research question
* You have a clear and realistic strategy to produce that report -> clear and realistic methodology

# Problem statement

Introduction to the problem (add any references relevant to this part, and if you do, be sure to include them in the reference list at the end of the document. Even better would be to use a reference manager like Endnote, Zotero, or Mendeley, as they can make your reference list for you).

Start broad and then slowly zoom in on the exact problem you are addressing. One paragraph per message; one message per paragraph. It can help to write first in a list of bullet points the messages that you want to convey, get their order right, and then write each out in a single paragraph.

Don't say anything about your objective here! Focus on the problem. However, if somebody would read *only* your problem statement, but they could guess correctly from the problem statement what the objective is going to be, then you have written a good problem statement.

# Objective

This research aims to... (One sentence with one objective)

A good research objective indicates the level of ambition. Note the difference in ambitions between the following verbs that might come right after "to":

* Explore
* Identify
* Investigate
* Assess
* Quantify

Avoid formulating a method as an objective ("To build a model..."; "To analyse..."). If the distinction between the objective and the method is unclear, ask yourself: can I fail in this objective, no matter how poorly I do it? If you can fail at it, it may count as an objective; if you would attain your objective no matter how poorly you do (*any* set of equations is a model), then it is more likely to be a method.

# Research questions

The research questions are (maximum 4)

1. Research question?
2. Research question?
3. Research question?
4. Research question?

Good research questions meet the following criteria:

1. They operationalise your objective. In other words, they divide the big problem that is the objective up in smaller parts (the research questions) that make it more feasible.
2. When you have answered the research questions, you have attained the objective.
3. They are unambiguous: there is only one way to interpret them.
4. We need *your* research to answer the research question. If the question can be answered by picking up a text book it is not a good research question because the answer is there already.
5. For each question you can formulate a strategy to address it, e.g. by developing a model, doing a survey, etc.
6. After you have done your research, you can refer back to each question in your conclusions chapter and give the answer, based on your results.

# Methodology

Formulate for each question the strategy to address it. Be as precise as you can.

Research Question 1 will be addressed by...

Research Question 2 will be addressed by...

Research Question 3 will be addressed by...

Research Question 4 will be addressed by...

# Schedule

The methodology should have identified for you a list of tasks that need to be done, e.g. design a survey, select respondents, test your survey in the field, carry out the survey, do the analysis, write the report. Explain when you want to carry out each task. Set milestones: by this date I want to have that ready, etc.

# Data management

Your research will probably entail the collection of data through surveys, public data sources, interviews, and so on. It is important that after the completion of your thesis such data are stored in such a way that others, for example an exam committee, can reproduce your results from your data set and your scripts (R scripts or Stata do-files)[[1]](#footnote-1). Therefore, it is important in your proposal to anticipate the kind of data that you will collect and to have a plan on how you will submit those data. Typically you will submit, with your thesis, a zip-file that contains

* A simple txt file, named README.txt, that provides a description of all other files (data and code) in the zip file.
* The data files: this can be MS Excel files, csv files, Stata dta files, interview transcripts. The most important is that the file type is accessible: quantitative data must be in a file format that can be imported into a statistics programme like R or Stata, and interview transcripts must be translated to English.
* Scripts that produce your results from your data: this can be R scripts, Stata do-files, Matlab scripts, or any other coded script that a user can run with your data to reproduce your results. For this reason it is not recommended to use Excel for statistical analysis. You may use SPSS only if you know how to make SPSS scripts.
* If relevant: consent forms from your respondents to use the data they provided to you for your research.
* If relevant: the code of models that you developed, such as GAMS files or Python scripts. You can also include this as an appendix to your thesis.

You can also submit scans of your survey forms, but this may violate privacy restrictions. Discuss with your supervisor whether you should also submit the survey forms.

On Brightspace you can find an example of a data zip-file to be submitted with your thesis.

**References**

Everything that you refer to in the text should be in the reference list; everything that is in the reference list should be referred to in the text.

Journal articles:

Authors, year. Article title. *Journal title*. Volume(issue): pages. URL[[2]](#footnote-2).

Example:

Groeneveld, R.A., Springborn, M. and Costello, C. 2014. Repeated experimentation to learn about a flow-pollutant threshold. *Environmental and Resource Economics* 58(4):627-647. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10640-013-9713-4.

Reports and books:

Authors, year. *Report title*. Place published: Publisher. URL1

Example:

Groeneveld, R.A., Bouwman, A.F., Kruitwagen, S., and Van Ierland, E.C. 1998. *An environmental and economic model to assess the abatement costs of nitrate leaching in dairy farming*. Bilthoven, the Netherlands: National Institute of Public Health and the Environment. https://www.rivm.nl/bibliotheek/rapporten/715651009.pdf.

Chapters in books:

Authors, year. Chapter title. in Editors (Eds.), *Book title* (pp. pages). Place published: publisher. URL1

Example:

Groeneveld, R.A., Kruseman, G., & van Ierland, E.C. 2003. Global warming and the economics of land-use and land-cover change. In A.J. Dolman, A. Verhagen, & C.A. Rovers (Eds.), *Global Environmental Change and Land Use* (pp. 53-66). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. http://dx/doi.org/ 10.1007/978-94-017-0335-2\_3

1. Note that "data" can also entail qualitative data such as interview transcripts. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. URLs based on the publication's DOI are preferred. Use them whenever a DOI is available. The URL is http://dx.doi.org/[DOI] as in the example. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)