




Graduate Research Advanced Skills Program (GRASP)

Research Proposal Series (Milestone 1)

Developing & refining your research question

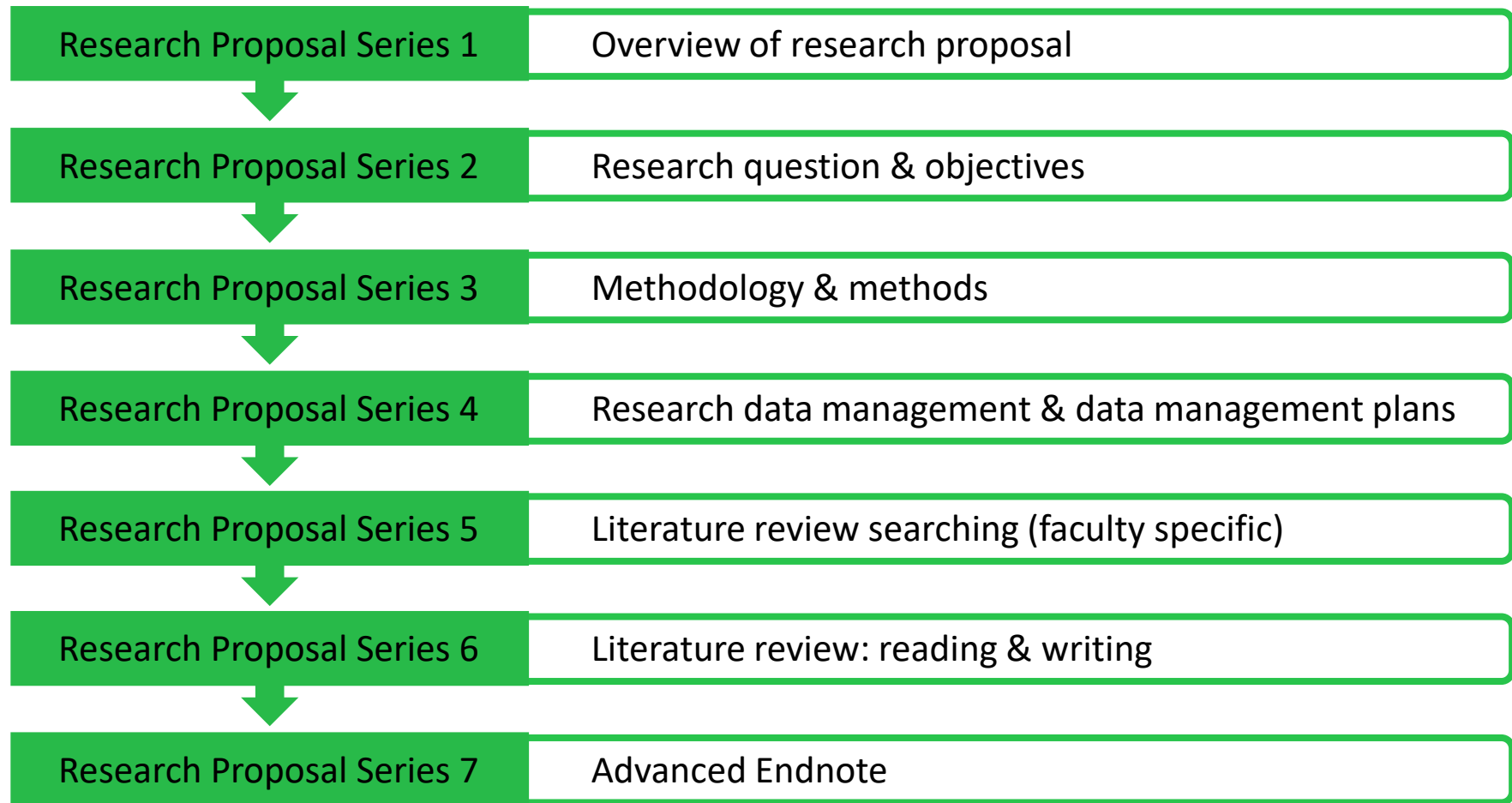
Dr Petra Dumbell, Sem 2 2022

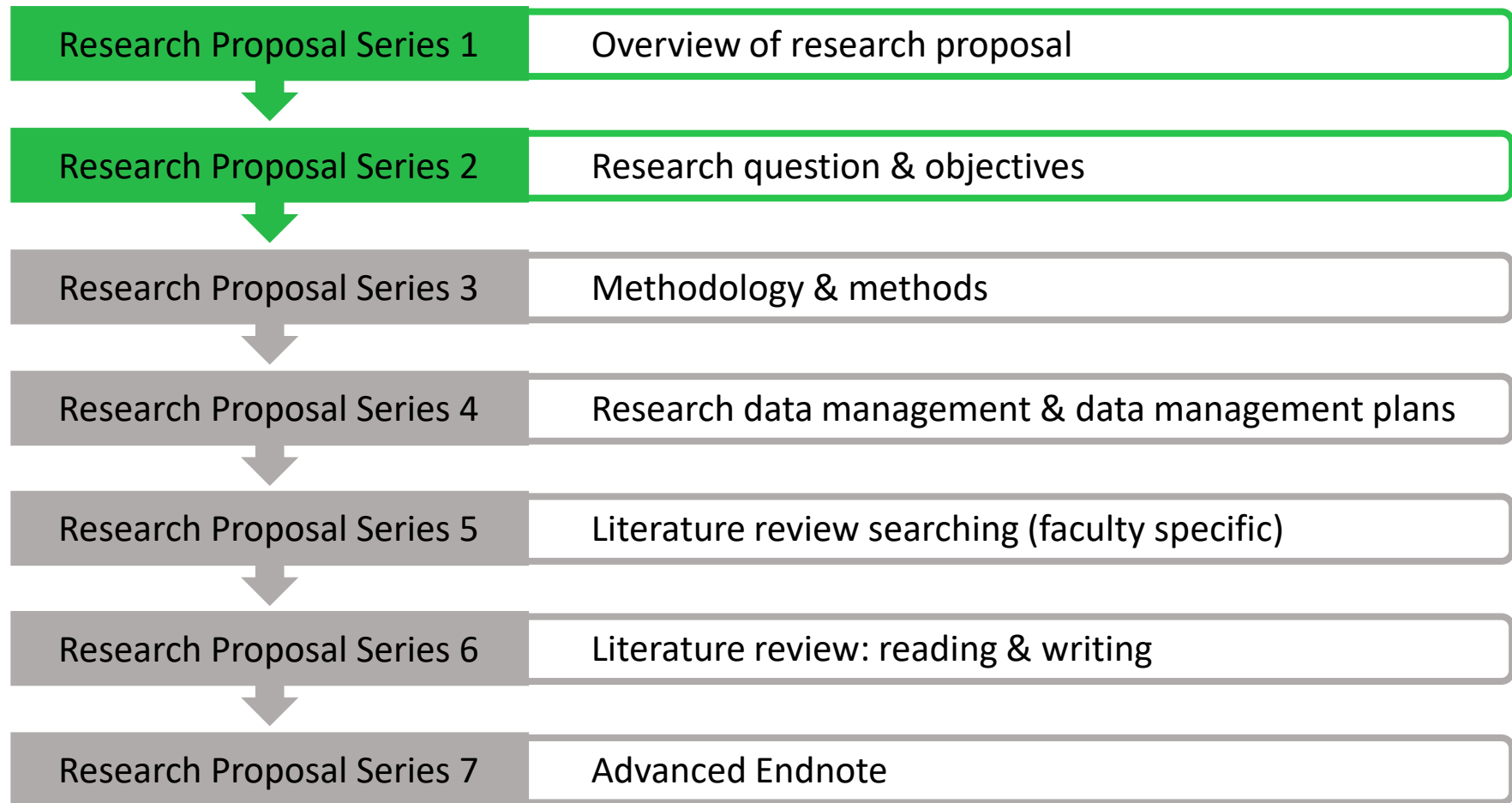


I acknowledge the Whadjuk Nyungar as the Custodians of the land on which I live and work. This Country was never ceded, it always was, and always will be Aboriginal land.

I pay my respects to Whadjuk Nyungar Elders past and present. I value their ancestral and continuing caring for Country practices and thank them for looking after this Country for so long.

I appreciate Indigenous ways of communication which are inclusive and respectful, and I recognise that this Country has been a place of teaching, research and learning for tens of thousands of years.





Why is a good RQ important?

A good research question helps to guide the entire research process

- Literature review (search strategies)
- Choice of methodology/methods
- Structure of thesis (chapters, sections)

Writing a RQ – Approach A

Jacobs (2013), three-part problem statement:

- Principle proposition
a statement that is true/generally accepted
- Interacting proposition
contradicts the principal proposition
- Speculative proposition
compares the previous two

Writing a RQ – Approach A

- Principle proposition

On the whole, the literature shows that anthropogenic activities have had a significant impact on the climate in megacities over the last 50 years.

- Interacting proposition

In recent years, however, the methodologies and assumptions used for measuring the climate effects of anthropogenic activities in megacities have been questioned by researchers in a number of disciplines.

- Speculative proposition

Rather than anthropogenic activities, it is hypothesised that land-use decisions have had the greatest impact on the climate in megacities over the last 50 years.

What does a good RQ look like?

*Q. To **what extent** have primary land-use decisions, surface characteristics and anthropogenic activities contributed to climate variability in global megacities over the past 50 years?*

*A. Despite the relative importance of surface characteristics and anthropogenic activities, **this research shows** that primary land-use decisions have had the greatest impact on climate variability in global megacities over the past 50 years.*

Writing a RQ – Approach B

- *Gap-spotting* is the most common way of generating questions
- Gap-spotting through problematization
- Problematization challenges assumptions in the literature (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011.)

Writing a RQ – Approach B

‘Root metaphor’ assumptions

generalized public image of a subject matter; e.g. organisations as *cultures*; climate change science as *left-wing*

‘Paradigm’ assumptions

ontological, epistemological, methodological assumptions; e.g. interpretive versus positivist approach

‘Ideology’ assumptions

political, historical, ethical, gender, and class-related assumptions

‘Field’ assumptions

shared by different schools of thought within a paradigm

Writing a RQ – Approach B

1. What key texts make up the domain?
2. What major assumptions underlie the literature?
3. Are the identified assumptions worthy to be challenged?
4. What alternative assumptions can be developed?
5. What major audiences hold the challenged assumptions?
6. Are the alternative assumptions likely to generate an interesting theory?

Good RQs begin with...

- What is the nature of...
- What are the functions of...
- What are the mechanisms by which...
- How do....perceive...
- What factors affect...
- What strategies are used...
- How do...affect...
- What are the effects of...
- What is the relationship between...
- How are...defined...
- How do...differ...
- Under what conditions do...

(Foss, 2015. p. 43)

Example RQs

Master by Research, Science & Engineering

The overarching aim of this thesis is to describe the functional diversity and vulnerability of marine fish communities throughout the Galapagos. This objective will be investigated in two data chapters... (Mckinley, 2022)

PhD, Humanities

How might a migrant writer employ the short story to explore the complexity of migrant experience in Australia? (Millner, 2021)

Example RQs

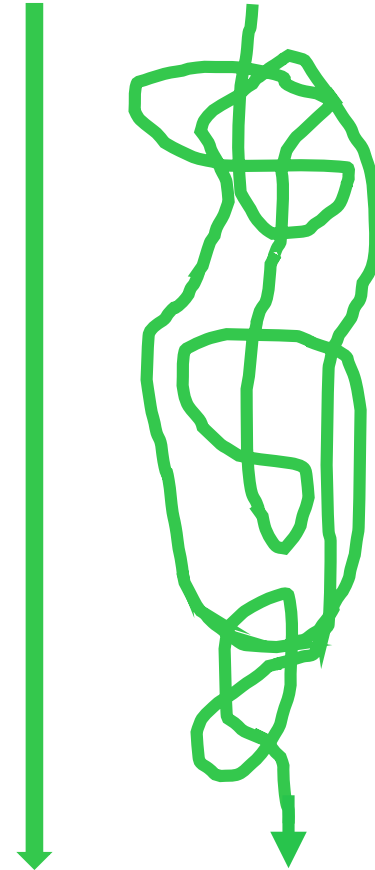
PhD, Health Sciences

The research aim was broken down to four questions:

- 1) What is the nature of organisational support provided to ECSWs in the first year of practice?
- 2) How are the experiences of organisational support described and interpreted by participants?
- 3) How can a theoretical analysis deepen our understanding of this information?
- 4) What enables and hinders the building of resilience for ECSWs? (Stewart, 2020)

A final word of advice...

- Read Evans & Gruba
- Have a look at other theses
- Ask for help and feedback



Resources

- Evans, D., Gruba, P. & Zovel, J.: The Introductory Chapter. In: How to Write a Better Thesis. 3rd ed. 2014 Cham: Springer, p.61-72. [Available as an ebook from the Library.](#)
I recommend the entire book, but the part titled “Aim and Scope of the Study” is particularly relevant as you work on your research question.
- To access theses (PhD and Masters) that have been submitted at Curtin, go to <https://espace.curtin.edu.au/> Please refer to the screenshot on the next page for some guidance on how to use filters when searching espace.

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