

Writing a Research Paper

Guidelines for Choosing an Advisor and a Topic

Choosing an Advisor (aka Supervisor)

- Talk to potential advisors
- Consider those with broad expertise in yours or related areas (experience supervising, publishing)
- Expert in your area can be important but not essential
- Someone you can get along with – may want to talk to them about the process

Choosing a Topic

- Think about subject areas that interest you (generally)
- Think about what is known and unknown about it (literature, gaps, questions)
- Something related to the literature and theory
- Something that has not been widely studied, or has been studied but not in a certain way, with certain data set, or in certain context, etc.
- Think about data sources available, and how you might study the phenomenon
- Think about what is doable with available data and time frame. Keep the scope realistic
- Read more about it, and come up with definable research questions and hypotheses
- Something you can live with and not get too sick of

Overview

RESEARCH PAPER STREAM		
Completed in one year		
Fall Sept-Dec	Winter Jan-Apr	Summer May-Aug
-Take 3 courses -Choose advisor -Choose topic -Submit MA supervisor form	-Take 3 courses plus Research Practicum (milestone)	-Research Paper (graded) -See overview, formatting in Grad Handbook

Research Paper

6 courses + Research Practicum (winter term) + Research Paper (summer term)

What is a Sociological Research Paper?

- An original research project of a more delimited scope
- An advance in knowledge (new question, new data, new control variables)
- Papers can vary in focus, topic and methodology. The length is around 30 pages
- Papers should look like a standard paper published in a sociological journal (can use these and previous research papers as a guide)
 - Can use quantitative methodology, qualitative methodology (small sample), content/policy analysis, or in rare cases can be more theoretical

Considerations

- This is a challenging option: you must identify a problem, study the literature, form hypotheses or research questions, do some data analysis, and write up your assessment of the literature, your results and implications. Most of this should be done second term – although you can finalize, polish and revise in the summer term.
- A lot to do in a short period of time

- Research questions should be related to the literature in your sub-area (address a gap in the literature), and ideally should be theoretically informed
- Given time and space constraints, your question may be somewhat delimited. Further, your ability to study a given topic may be highly restricted by the availability of data. Before you finalize your questions, see what information is available to you, and what you can reasonably study
- If you choose a qualitative research topic (low-risk only), you must submit an ethics proposal (in conjunction with your advisor) to the Non-Medical Research Ethics board. I am happy to review these beforehand to provide feedback. Ideally, this stage should be completed no later than reading week.

Activities for the Fall

- Talk to professors in your area of interest. Choose an advisor with whom you can work. Talk about research ideas, data availability, etc.
- **Submit supervisor form**
- Look into data availability: secondary data sets, professors' data sets, available documentation, etc.
- Narrow down your research interests: Can go top-down, bottom-up or combination
- Before January read a major work or two in your field (advisors can suggest some important ones)
- Come to class in early January with an advisor, a general research question, and some general idea about how you are going to address your research question

MA Sociological Research Practicum (winter term) January to April, 'milestone' (not graded)

- The practicum will cover the various sections of a traditional research paper, discuss making the case for your research, refining your research questions, and writing about your research (problems and challenges of writing, formulating research hypotheses, writing up results, etc.)
- You work closely with an advisor who will help you define your topic, guide you to the relevant literature, assist you with data analysis, and so forth

Research Paper (summer term) All requirements must be completed by August 31, graded (out of 100)

- The expectation is that complete draft will be completed by the end of July, final paper submitted by second week in August to allow time for the advisor to grade the paper
- Final degree requirement is to publish your research paper in Scholarship@Western

Search for research papers and theses on the website (by supervisor, etc.)

sociology.uwo.ca → Graduate → Find A Past Thesis