

# Master's Research Project Guide

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## Introduction

The information provided below aims to answer some of the most frequently asked questions about the process of writing a Master's Research Project (MRP) for the Master of Arts in Education Studies program.

## Characteristics of an MRP

### What is a Master's Research Project (MRP)?

An MRP is an extended research paper that:

- focuses on a specific educational issue or problem in more detail than is possible within any single course
- has a relationship to existing theory
- reviews current literature
- has sufficient detail and information about research methods to allow for proper replication where appropriate
- contains an evaluative component indicating the extent to which the study's objectives were achieved
- is couched in proper English usage.

A wide range of options is permitted as areas of investigation so that graduate students can demonstrate their capacity for independent research and scholarly reporting (See Appendix A for a description of a number of different types of projects). Although the student prepares a Project under the direction of a Supervisor, the final responsibility for completing it lies with the student.

To undertake an MRP students must first complete 8 Graduate level courses. These courses will be decided upon in conjunction with your Supervisor.

Please note: It is important that students who plan to apply to a doctoral program in future be aware of the possible implications of choosing a Master's Research Project pathway in their MA. We strongly suggest students investigate the admission requirements of the institutions they may want to attend as a doctoral student. As part of what is acceptable, some Western Education PhD programs will consider an MRP-based degree for admission. Please note that normally a thesis-based Master's degree is preferred for entry to many doctoral programs.

## Getting Started

Identify a topic or topics of interest and an issue or phenomenon you would like to explore.

### **What if I have no ideas?**

An important part of the proposal writing process is turning questions and ideas into researchable questions:

- Review your course texts and assignments. What was most engaging?
- Talk to faculty members and other graduate students about their research and your interests.
- Look at the theses on Scholarship@Western.

### **What are some advantages of deciding on a topic early in the program?**

- You can choose courses that allow you to develop background knowledge to support your research.
- You can find out early in the program whether you need to revise your plans based on the availability of potential supervisors.
- An MRP Supervisor may recommend that certain additional graduate courses be taken before work on the MRP begins. You may save yourself additional work if you identify the general nature of your planned research before you have completed all of your course work.

### **What are some advantages of waiting to make a decision about my MRP topic?**

- You can develop a broad-based understanding of the field.
- You can be open to new questions and new ways to configure your research.

### **How late in the program can I make the decision?**

You should decide on a topic no later than the end of the semester in which you complete your last required course.

## **MRP Proposal Preparation**

### **What is the purpose of a proposal?**

- The proposal should leave the reader in no doubt as to what you intend to accomplish in the MRP and how you will accomplish it.
- The proposal is a crucial piece of work which must be completed BEFORE you invest time in detailed research.
- A well designed and tightly written proposal can save you much time and effort in composing the final product.
- Students typically write and revise several drafts of a proposal before the final submission.

### **What are the components of a proposal?**

The proposal must communicate clearly in standard written English what you propose to accomplish in your MRP. There is no set length for a proposal, but 10-15 pages

(double-spaced) is usually sufficient.

A proposal must meet the following criteria:

- The type of project being developed is indicated.
- The major issues to be discussed are outlined.
- The research techniques and methods of analyzing and/or interpreting the findings are described.
- The applicability of the study to educational scholarship and/or practice is demonstrated.
- Ethical issues are identified and discussed (if applicable).
- A preliminary bibliography is attached.

### **Style Manuals**

Students must follow a standard style manual, so that the presentation of references/bibliographies is consistent throughout the thesis and conforms to a style appropriate to the discipline. Faculty of Education students are expected to follow the American Psychological Association guidelines.

## **MRP Proposal Submission**

When your proposal is ready for submission, submit the following to the Graduate Programs Office:

- One copy of your proposal electronically.
- Master's Research Project Proposal Submission form (including electronic signatures from your supervisor), located on the Forms & Guidelines web page at [https://www.edu.uwo.ca/CSW/my-program/graduate-degrees/forms\\_guides.html](https://www.edu.uwo.ca/CSW/my-program/graduate-degrees/forms_guides.html)

Please note: Students must obtain Supervisor's signatures before submission.

Please follow the detailed instruction document for electronic signatures which is available on our Forms & Guidelines page: [https://www.edu.uwo.ca/CSW/my-program/graduate-degrees/forms\\_guides.html](https://www.edu.uwo.ca/CSW/my-program/graduate-degrees/forms_guides.html)

Submission of the MRP Proposal is due by the last day of the 3rd term in program.

You will be notified by the Graduate Programs Office when your proposal has been approved.

### **May I make changes to my research plan after the proposal has been accepted?**

Acceptance of the proposal does not mean that you are committed to it in all circumstances. Unforeseen difficulties or unexpected findings might necessitate revisions or amendments to your original proposal. You should consult your Supervisor if you feel you need to make changes.

## MRP Preparation

### How often should I meet with my Supervisor?

There is no official rule, but it is imperative that you maintain close contact with your Supervisor regarding the progress of the MRP. Quite often a series of regularly scheduled appointments is established. This is particularly crucial during the final stages of preparation.

### Are other faculty members allowed to advise me?

While working on their MRP, a student should feel free to consult any member of the Faculty of Education who may be able to offer advice. However, normally, students will consult with their Supervisor prior to consulting with others.

### What is the right length for an MRP?

There is no set limit to the length of an MRP. The only reasonable criterion is the length should enable you to discuss adequately the issue being explored. Typically, an MRP is approximately 50-60 pages in length.

## Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see [Scholastic Discipline for Graduate Students in the Western Academic Handbook](#)).

Plagiarism checking: Western University uses software for plagiarism checking. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form for plagiarism checking. Students are required to follow Western University policies concerning plagiarism and the extensive use of copyrighted material.

## Proper Format for the MRP

### What are the components of an MRP?

The Project shall normally include the following in the order given:

- Title page (sample attached)
- Abstract (not more than 150 words)
- Dedication (optional)
- Acknowledgements (optional)
- Table of Contents
- List of Tables

- List of Figures
- List of Appendices
- Main body chapters
- References properly formatted
- Appendices – copyright permissions (if applicable)

### **Formatting the MRP**

Students must follow a standard style manual, so that the presentation of references/bibliographies is consistent throughout the MRP and conforms to a style appropriate to the discipline. Faculty of Education students are expected to follow the American Psychological Association guidelines.

## **MRP Examination & Final Submission**

### **What is the procedure for submitting the MRP for examination?**

Once your Supervisor feels that the Project is ready for examination, the MRP is then submitted to the Graduate Office along with an approved and e-signed Master's Research Project Final Submission Form. The Reader will be chosen by your supervisor. They may be chosen from your field of study, from another field of study in the Faculty of Education, or from another faculty within the University. Both the Supervisor and the Reader examine the Project. The Reader is a person who has not been involved in the supervision of the Project. Students who are supervised by two professors, working as co-supervisors, must have their Project read by a Reader who is not one of the Supervisors.

Both the supervisor and the second reader have two weeks to grade the MRP independently. Grade reports are submitted to the Graduate Office. The Graduate Office will then send these reports to the Supervisor, who will discuss with the student. Grade Reports and comments are not shared **directly with the student**. Should any modifications or amendments be required, the student must submit one copy of the revised MRP to the Graduate Programs Office electronically by the deadline specified below. A pass/fail scheme is used, and will be recorded on the student's transcript as a course.

### **Project Final Submission Deadlines:**

The final date for submitting your final Master's Research Project is one week before the final day of the term. Not meeting this deadline may result in fees being charged to your tuition account for the next academic term.

# APPENDIX

## Appendix A – Types of Projects

This Appendix includes some general guidelines and comments for types of Projects that may be presented at the Faculty of Education. The notes herein are designed to be suggestive rather than restrictive, and graduate students are encouraged to discuss alternative types, or differences within the types considered herein, with their Project Supervisor, or indeed with any member of the Graduate Education faculty.

In this Appendix, comments are included on the following types of Master's Research Projects: quantitative research study, curriculum design unit, case study, handbook, evaluation instrument, state of the art review, and analysis and annotated bibliography. Students interested in types that differ from those considered herein (e.g., historical study, or a curriculum evaluation, etc.) should discuss details with their Project Supervisor.

### **A. QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL OR SURVEY-DESIGN STUDY**

Generally speaking, studies of this nature are organized in chapters containing information as outlined below:

#### Chapter One - "An Introduction to the Study"

This chapter usually contains most of the following sections:

- a rationale/need for the study
- a brief overview of the problem
- a statement of the problem
- the hypotheses or questions being addressed by the study
- the assumptions and limitations of the study
- definition of terms used in the study

#### Chapter Two - "A Review of the Literature"

This chapter of the study deals with the background literature in the field of study. It is suggested that the section be organized to contain:

- a historical overview of the area
- studies completed in the area including contemporary knowledge
- relevant studies about the methodology being used

#### Chapter Three - "The Research Procedures"

This chapter contains the following elements:

- a description of the population sample: where drawn from, how drawn, socio-economic information, etc.
- the procedures following sequential indication of the steps from beginning to end undertaken to complete the study
- research design/model utilized; this may be shown diagrammatically and detail is given about elements of the design (pre- and post- tests, treatment, groups, etc.)
- for quantitative studies, treatment of the data is outlined including a description of the tests used (reliability and validity), scoring procedures, design of the treatment and statistical treatment of the data

#### Chapter Four - "Results of the Study"

This chapter usually reports on the findings from the study. The findings, once tabled or organized by hypotheses, are usually discussed in some detail. Discussion centres especially around explanations for the findings and the significance of the findings.

#### Chapter Five - "Summary and Conclusions"

This chapter contains a brief overview of the study. The following organization is usually employed:

- restatement of the problem
- main features of the method
- main findings of the study (often tabled or listed)

Also the chapter contains some indication of the investigator's conclusions which are usually tabled or listed. Detailed discussion of these conclusions usually follows, with reference to the early literature. The chapter ends with an indication of the implications for further hypothesizing and research. Out of this, usually subsequent research indicators are given.

NOTE: Usually, at the end of chapters one to four, a brief summary of the chapter is contained. This summary is an overview of the main elements of the particular chapter.

## **B. CURRICULUM DESIGN STUDY**

A "Curriculum unit" comprises an instructional plan for a period of three or four weeks or longer. It is not a series of lesson plans, but rather a design or strategy, perhaps cross-disciplinary, which another teacher could follow or adapt to effect the intended student learnings. Sample lesson plans may be included, but they are not the chief focus of the Project.

The Project as submitted may include the following components:

- Rationale: A statement of the author's views of the importance or utility of the

unit (e.g., why it should be implemented, how it fits into the overall curriculum and philosophy of the program).

- **Background to the Study:** A review of the literature explaining and underlying the approach taken and the unit created. Ministry of Education and school board documents may be included, but empirical and theoretical works should also be examined, since they provide sources for both goals and methods.
- **Aims and Objectives of the Unit:** These should provide a clear statement of purpose for both teacher and students. The sources of instructional goals (e.g., the subject, the student, the institution, society at large) may be discussed, and the scope and sequence of learnings described.
- **Outline of Planned Learning Activities.**
- **Conditions for Implementation of the Unit:** Descriptions of student entry characteristics (age, previous learning, attitudes, etc.) as well as the learning resources (time, space, materials, personnel).
- **Other Applications or Extensions of the Unit:** Ways of adapting the unit to different conditions may be included (e.g., different levels of instructional methods, individualization, alternative content), as well as uses in other academic areas of social settings.
- **Evaluation of Student Progress:** A description of evaluation methods to be used, with sample instruments where appropriate, may be included.
- **Evaluation of the Unit:** It is most desirable that the unit should be tried out by several teachers, and that their reactions and those of their pupils be assessed. If this is not possible, some attempt at an objective evaluation should be made (other teachers or consultants are often very willing to read and criticize a curriculum plan).

### **C. CASE STUDY**

Using an individual or a group as the focus of analysis, this Project type is amenable to a variety of investigations into a wide variety of educational issues. The framework for the case study is the specification and evaluation of a theoretical issue to be investigated. For example, the study of the individual or group can become a test case for program or treatment intervention, as well as for developmental or learning perspectives. Within Educational Administration, the case-study method is based on the approach developed by Harvard University. Particular incidents or situations relating to individuals, groups, or the organization are developed in order to apply appropriate problem-solving/decision-making models. Chapter headings may include Problem Identification, Case Analysis, Developing and Evaluating Alternatives, Choice of Best Alternative, Implementation of Solution Alternative, Review of Literature, Legislation, etc. There are many other approaches to case study research.

Consult with your Supervisor concerning alternatives that are appropriate for your field of study.

#### **D. HANDBOOK**

Handbooks or manuals are prompted by a need to develop a practical planning guide for teachers and/or students in a particular curriculum domain or to deal with a particular set of circumstances. The format for these documents often reflects this strong practical and immediate “usability” by the inclusion of a step-by-step procedure that can be followed by the reader in order to achieve the desired outcome. In some cases, the handbook represents an individual’s attempt to streamline a specific area of education. In such instances the handbook is designed to alleviate teacher frustrations and obstacles which may be involved in such experiences by providing a procedural strategy for the teacher to follow.

#### **E. EVALUATION INSTRUMENT**

Students interested in developing an evaluation instrument should normally have taken an appropriate group of courses related to issues in evaluation. A Master’s Research Project in the area may be based on the following structure:

1. An Introduction to the Study
  - rationale and need for such an instrument
  - an overview of the field
  - problem statement
  - assumptions and/or limitations
  - definition of terms
2. Review of the Literature
  - an overview of past assessment procedures
  - an overview of contemporary practices
  - a synthesis and a critique of the area
3. Instrumentation
  - identification of criteria (sources)
  - types of questions
  - formulation of questions
  - response mode
  - ordering of questions (sectioning)
4. The Procedures (Mechanics)
  - sample defined (target group)
  - pilot testing

- modifications (changes, deletions, additions)
- validity and reliability checks
- administration of instrument

#### 5. Results

- item analysis/unit analysis
- classification analysis
- tables/charts/graphs
- anecdotal remarks (personal feedback)

#### 6. Summary and Conclusions

- overview of the Project (problem/method/results)
- discussion (strengths and weaknesses) and interpretation
- suggestions for practice
- suggestions for future developments

### **F. STATE OF THE ART REVIEW AND ANALYSIS**

This Project type takes as its focus a significant educational problem or issue to be reviewed and analyzed. This Project type is amenable to the study of on-going or current educational controversies which require the critical evaluation of competing educational and psychological theories and their implications for educational practice. The format for this type of Project report may include:

- introduction that includes basic definitions used
- review of the literature
- alternative solutions or interpretations offered
- recommendations in particular situations
- conclusions

### **G. ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

An annotated bibliography would usually have an introductory chapter reviewing and defining the question, problem area or issue being examined, much like the first chapter of other types of projects. A chapter describing the methods used in focusing and delimiting the issue/question, and describing the methods used in conducting the search and preparing the annotations should be included. The central part of the report would be the annotations reporting on a very thorough review of the literature. The report would also have a discussion and concluding chapter(s). A more extensive list of additional references on the topic might be appended to the report.

### **H. INTEGRATED ARTICLE**

An Integrated Article Project will treat discrete but related problems in different chapters. Each of the major chapters would be made of content from, or entire, published,

submitted or unpublished articles (or publishable pieces of writing) not necessarily reporting data *from an* original research project for which the student was the principal contributor. The articles may be for a professional journal or for public media, newsletter, magazine or monograph. The first and last chapters would consist of connecting/integrating materials to provide logical bridges between the different chapters, thereby achieving an integration of information. Full citations must be provided. The substance of the integrated report should be consistent with the quantity and quality of original work expected in an MRP. When the integrated articles are for an academic journal or monograph or when they are reporting data from an original research project, they will go through the processes of a thesis not a Project.

## Appendix B – Sample Title Page

BEHAVIOURISM: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

(Spine Title: type here; leave brackets)

by

John A. Doe

Faculty of Education

A Master's Research Project submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education Studies

School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario Month Year\*

© John A. Doe Year\*\*

\*Month and Year Master's Research Project submitted to Reader for examination

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## Appendix C – MRP Submission Checklist

To avoid the disappointment of having your Master's Research Project returned for further revisions, please check it over before submitting it. Make sure that you have followed this guide with respect to the following points:

1. Title page
  - a. Does the title page contain all the information as per the sample in the Guidelines?
2. References
  - a. Do the in-text citations as well as references conform to an approved format?
3. Margins
  - a. Are the margins consistent for all pages, both text and non-text material -- at least 1.5" on the left hand side and 1" on the other three sides?
4. Typeface/typing, etc.
  - a. Is the typeface of letter quality and consistent throughout the Project?
  - b. Is all text, apart from quotations and footnotes, either double-spaced or 1.5 spaced?
5. Pagination
  - a. Does the pagination follow the guidelines?
6. Appendices
  - a. If you obtained Ethical Approval, is it included in an appendix?

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