**Methodology**

This section is essential to most good research proposals. How you study a problem is often as important as the results you collect. This section includes a description of the general means through which the goals of the study will be achieved: methods, materials, procedures, tasks, etc.

An effective methodology section should:

* Introduce the overall methodological approach for each problem or question. Is your study qualitative or quantitative? Are you going to take a special approach, such as action research, or use case studies?
* Indicate how the approach fits the overall research design. Your methods should have a clear connection with your research questions and/or hypotheses. In other words, make sure that your methods will actually answer your questions—Don Thackrey notes that the most common reason for the rejection of professional proposals is that “the proposed tests, or methods, or scientific procedures are unsuited to the stated objective.”
* Describe the specific methods of data collection you are going to use—e.g. surveys, interviews, questionnaires, observation, archival or traditional library research.
* Explain how you intend to analyze and interpret your results. Will you use statistical analysis? Will you use specific theoretical perspectives to help you analyze a text or explain observed behaviors?
* If necessary, provide background and rationale for methodologies that are unfamiliar for your readers. (Typically, the social sciences and humanities require more explanation/rationale of methods than the hard sciences).
  + If applicable, you may also need to provide a rationale for subject selection (particularly if you have not already provided one). For instance, if you propose to conduct interviews and use questionnaires, how do you intend to select the sample population? If you are analyzing literary texts, which texts have you chosen, and why?
* Address potential limitations. Are there any practical limitations that could affect your data collection? How will you attempt to control for potential confounding variables and errors?

**Tips on drafting your methodology section**:

* Break down your methodology into easily digestible subsections.
  + In the physical sciences, these sections may include subjects, design, apparatus, instrumentation, process, analysis, etc.
  + In the social sciences, these sections may include selection of participants, interview process, profiles, interpretive and analytic framework, methods of qualitative analysis, etc.
  + In the humanities, these sections may include scholarly research, archival research, theoretical orientation, etc.
* Remember that your methods section may also require supporting literature.
* Anticipate and pre-empt the audience’s methodological concerns.
  + If the audience might have a problem with a facet of the methodology, admit this difficulty and justify your approach.
  + If your methodology may lead to problems you can anticipate (including timeframe problems), state this openly and show why pursuing the methodology outweighs the risk of these problems cropping up.

**Key Point:** If you have demonstrated that you have considered even the downside of your methods, their advantages will seem more carefully developed.