

**Format for a research proposal for an epidemiological study
(e.g. for a MSc thesis)**

Sections & their components	Brief description
Title and author's page (1 page)	(i) 'Title' [informative, must reflect general objective] (ii) Student's name and number (iii) Proposed degree (iv) Supervisor: 'name' (v) Co-supervisor: 'name' (vi) Date submitted
Summary	Abstract of the proposal
Table of Contents	Headings (e.g. Introduction) and subheadings (e.g. Problem statement, Rationale for the study) + corresponding page numbers
Introduction (~3 pages)	
Problem statement	A concise description of the nature of the problem (the discrepancy between what is and what should be) and of the size, distribution and severity of the problem (who is affected, where, since when, and what are the consequences).
Rationale for the study	Origin/source of the topic. Importance of the problem. A brief description of any solutions to the problem that have been tried in the past, how well they have worked, and why further research is needed.
Significance of the study	A description of the type of information expected to result from the project and how this information will be used to help solve the problem (contribution to existing knowledge).
General objective	State the general aim or purpose of the study.
Specific objectives	Based on your general objective, list the specific objectives to be achieved at the end of the study. This can either be in the form of a statement (to determine, to compare, ...), a research question, or a hypothesis (in the case of analytical or experimental studies). Hypotheses are propositions about relationships between variables or differences between groups that are tested.
Literature Review (~ 3 pages)	It is an extensive, systematic and critical review of all the relevant publications dealing with the topic/problem being investigated. The bulk of data-based literature should come from primary sources of data, which are journals.
Research methods (~ 4 pages)	
Study design	Select and explain the design of your study based on the research objectives. State that your study is quantitative. Then state whether it is an observational study or an experimental study. If it is an observational study, is it a descriptive study or an analytical study (cross-sectional/survey, case-control, cohort study).

Study setting	Describe the study area e.g. location, climate and other geographical features; socio-demographic and cultural characteristics of the people; an overview of the health status of the people and of the health-care system. Only include the aspects that are relevant to the problem being investigated.
Study population and sampling	Define the study population (e.g. age, sex, place, condition, etc.), the sampling or selection method, and justification of sample size (power calculation).
Measurement instrument	Based on your objectives, research design and study population, identify the appropriate instrument for data collection, such as: interview guide, questionnaire, data collection form. Describe the instrument in detail (including validity, reliability).
Plan for data collection	Who will collect what data, in what sequence, how, when?
Plan for data management and analysis	Categorizing, coding, data entry, verification, statistical techniques.
Ethical considerations	State how you intend to follow the ethical rules (e.g. informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, care of vulnerable groups, etc.).
Pre-test or pilot study	State how you intend to carry out either a pre-test (in which you test certain aspects of your study, e.g. the measurement instrument) or a pilot study (in which you conduct the whole study on a small scale).
Work plan and budget (~2.5 pages)	
	- Task allocation, organization of venues, transport etc.
	- Time schedule (include all aspects of the study)
	- Budget (identify major categories, make reasonable estimates of the expenses in each category)
Plan for dissemination and implementation of results (~0.5 page)	Manner of reporting results (e.g. meetings, journals) and what will be done to ensure that the results are used.
References	Choose a reference format e.g. the Harvard method, APA Style.
Appendix(es)	Include a copy of e.g. the measurement instrument(s), informed consent letter and form.

Read more:

- Joubert, G. and Ehrlich R. (2007). *Epidemiology. A research manual for South Africa (2nd Edition)*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa.
- Anderson, J. and Poole, M. (2008). *Assignment & thesis writing: South African edition*. Cape Town: Juta and company Ltd.