Part One: “Thinking Stage” before drafting the proposal

Brainstorm multiple key words & phrases that represent concepts you believe you will use in your thesis. These key words can come from previous research, course work, and/or readings.

a. Compare these concept words & phrases against the requirements you have. When you’re done, the concept words should be able to be
   i. turned into a research question (literally – make it into a question!)
   ii. testable, either empirically or theoretically. (This will become the Methodology Section.)
   iii. one that your advisor approves
   iv. timely/relevant in the field
   v. one that you find interesting & compelling enough to devote months of research and writing.

b. Select one concept that fulfills the four premises above. (Save concepts that meet some of the premises for later career moves, such as articles & presentations.)

c. Double-check your evaluation with your advisor(s).

Part Two: Drafting the proposal

As writers, we all have different ways of approaching the task. Some people write as they read; some, afterwards. Other writers write different sections simultaneously, moving from one to another when they get stuck. (This is what I do.) Generally, though, writers first write an outline and then create a draft by working from what they know (methodology) to the more ‘fuzzy’ areas: theoretical/conceptual.

Part Three: Here is a generic proposal structure.
(Important sections are underlined)

1. Title Page (1 page)
   a. Title with informative sub-title
   b. Author
   c. Institution & Degree, Program

2. Abstract (1 page, approximately 200 words)
   a. Rationale for thesis
   b. Key statement (hypothesis)
   Summary of methodology (possibly preliminary findings)
   c. Implications of work. Between c & d, there must a ‘move,’ as to how your work incorporates into this literature so far.
   d. No citations, tables, headings!
3. Table of Contents (1 page), A sample is below
   a. Abstract
   b. Lists of Tables & Figures
   c. Introduction
   d. Thesis Statement
   e. Approach/methods—how you’re addressing the issue
   f. Preliminary results & discussion

4. Objectives & aims (1 – 2 pp) This section generally moves from broad to specific: background of your study to your research question.
   a. What is your hypothesis, “research problem”?
   b. What is your approach?
   c. What is your aim/objective?
   d. Which theory will form the framework? (Review of Literature/RL)
   e. Often opens with a ‘hook’ for the reader; ends with the thesis statement.
   You can begin to integrate references into the proposal at this point.

5. Background & significance (3 - 4 pages)
   a. Why is your work important? Here you give details more specific details about your research subject, describing what's already known on the specific topic (include references).
   b. What other work has been done so far? (RL can be integrated or stand alone)
      o You critically evaluate previous research
   c. What are some issues that concern the research you’re proposing?
   d. What are the key terms? Do you create terms of your own? If so, why?
   e. Any assumptions crucial to this approach?

6. Research Design & Methods (2 - 3 pages) (The more empirical the research, the more important this section. If empirical, include the hypothesis (and alternatives) you intend to test.)
   a. What procedures will accomplish your specific aims?
   b. How will data be collected, analyzed, and interpreted? 2-3 pages describing your research approach (exploratory, scientific, problem solving), the tools and study design you will use how you will process samples and handle data (type of data, statistical analyses, data
   c. How is any new methodology you're using an advantage over earlier ones?
   d. What alternatives will you use if methods fail?
   e. Expected Results - describe what you expect to find, and how results would be interpreted and applied.
   f. Timeline: Approximately 1 page. You detail when each stage of your project will be accomplished. The Timeline can be set up as

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an outline with target dates.

7. Preliminary Studies (3-4 pages) (optional)
   a. If you have already started work and have some findings to report, these
      findings further justify your aims and assess your methods to see if they
      are feasible.

8. Literature Cited   Proposals generally have a range of 10 – 20
   references. References from primary research literature are
   considered insufficient to represent the available information in most
   cases. Referencing style is MLA, Turabian, APA, or the one below
   approved by Cultural Studies.

References / Bibliography (Anthro Style)

- Bibliography
- Within:
  According to Comaroff (1992: 69) ... Or ... some authors suggest
  (Comaroff 1992: 69).
- Articles:
  Schapera, Isaac. 1957. “Marriage of Near Kim Among the Tswana.”
  Africa 27(2): 139-159
- Book chapters:
  Schneider, Harold. 1964. “Economics in East African Societies.” In

9. Appendix
   a. Examples are: Data sheets, questionnaire samples, flow charts,
      illustrations, maps, software listings, and drawn charts.
   b. Materials that belong to different categories are placed in separate
      appendices.
   c. Headings for appendices are capitalized, centered, and lettered if
      there is more than one appendix.
   d. Each appendix has a descriptive title -- just like the main section
      headings.
Part IV. Variations in Proposals. As with many other genres in academic writing, the content of the proposal shapes the format. The structure can, in a sense, ‘organic,’ shift a bit from writer to writer, in terms of the arguments of the thesis. The parts are all there, but sometimes in different order and degree. Here are two sample formats:

Sample Format: More Empirical

Type One
- Overall objectives & specific aims
- Background & Significance
- Research Design and Methods (+Time Table)
- Preliminary Studies
- References
- Appendix

Type Two
- Statement of topic
- Aims
- RL (Separate Section)
- Theoretical Orientation
- Methodology
- Timetable
- Tentative Outline
- References
References


http://www.1deo.columbia.edu/~martins/sen_res/how_to_write_a_thesis_proposal
http://www.imoat.net/handbook/th-pro.htm
http://openwetware.org/wiki/How_to_write_a_thesis_proposal