

# M.S.G. Research Project: Guidelines

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*The Gerontology Academic Program recommends these guidelines for structuring your proposed Research Project. We strongly encourage you to examine the MSG projects on display in the Gerontology Office.*

**Note:** *These guidelines differ from those of the M.S.G. Thesis. Please see the Gerontology Academic Program website and CSUF Graduate Studies office for specifics regarding thesis preparation.*

*All work that is not your own must be cited according to APA procedures. For more information, refer to the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th Edition, or visit <http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2015/09/best-of-the-apa-style-blog-2015-edition.html>. For instructions regarding inclusion of digital object identifiers (DOIs) in your bibliography, please visit <http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/digital-object-identifier-doi/>.*

## Introduction

Suggested components are described below, with examples of how other researchers have accomplished these aspects in their manuscripts. **(The quotations are included because these are direct quotes of others' work. You should avoid direct quotations in your project write-up, opting instead to use your own words in describing other's research and then cite these sources using APA-style)**

### *Problem Statement:*

State the problem that motivated your research. Your statement should provide an overview of an issue, and be expressed in only one or two sentences. Include facts (from a credible source).

- Example 1. "Behavioral symptoms such as repetitive speech, wandering, and sleep disturbances are a core clinical feature of Alzheimer disease and related dementias" (Gitlin, Kales, & Lyketsos, 2012, p. 2020).
- Example 2. "In many cases, directives help guide decision making for patients who have lost decision-making capacity. In some cases, however, directives may conflict with what physicians or surrogates view as what is in the patient's best interest" (Smith, Lo, & Sudore, 2013, p. 1241).

### *Relevance of the Problem:*

State the reason the problem is worth exploring. You may include a sentence describing the major positions held in the literature regarding your subject matter. You may also briefly state the relevance that the problem has or the implications it has for the field of gerontology.

- Example 1. "If untreated, these behaviors can accelerate disease progression, worsen functional decline and quality of life, cause significant caregiver distress, and result in earlier nursing home placement" (Gitlin, Kales, & Lyketsos, 2012, p. 2020).

- Example 2. “These conflicts can place substantial emotional and moral burdens on physicians and surrogates, and there is little practical guidance for how to address them” (Smith, Lo, & Sudore, 2013, p. 1241).

### *Purpose of the Project:*

Write one or two sentences.

- Example 1. “Hence, we undertook a systematic review in order to identify developments in family [caregiver] support that have occurred over the last decade” (Hudson et al., 2010).
- Example 2. “Objective — To investigate the utility of the Cognitive Function Instrument (CFI) to track early changes in cognitive function in older individuals without clinical impairment at baseline” (Amariglio et al., 2015).

### *Justify the Project:*

State the reason that your project is important. For example, express how your project will address a weakness in current services, meet the needs of older adults, contribute to existing research, or fill gaps in the literature.

- Example 1. “Nonpharmacologic management of behavioral symptoms in dementia can significantly improve quality of life and patient-caregiver satisfaction” (Gitlin, Kales, & Lyketsos, 2012, p. 2020).
- Example 2. “While risk factors for behavioral disorders have been identified in several studies, few studies have focused on the evolution of these disorders” (Pongan et al., 2014, p. 308).

### *Describe the Proposed End Product:*

Describe the expected outcome or end product.

- Example: “We propose a 5-question framework for untangling the conflict between previous directives and best interests of a patient with a surrogate decision maker: (1) Is the clinical situation an emergency? (2) In view of the patient’s values and goals, how likely will the benefits of the intervention outweigh the burdens? (3) How well does the advance directive fit the situation at hand? (4) How much leeway did the patient provide the surrogate for overriding the advance directive? (5) How well does the surrogate represent the patient’s best interests?” (Smith, Lo, & Sudore, 2013, p. 1241).

## Literature Review

The purpose of your literature review is to demonstrate the need for your research project by evaluating the state of knowledge on the topic (i.e., what we already know, what is contested, and what we don't know). It provides the context for your study.

It is your responsibility to identify the most influential theories and writing on your topic, the methods used to address your topic, and the current findings and conclusions concerning your topic. Be familiar with these, and position your project in relation to the literature.

Read and evaluate the literature with an awareness of its connection to your proposed research. The general question to keep in mind is: **what contribution will my proposed project make to what has already been said or done?**

*Describe the State of Current Research (Within the Past Ten Years):*

Present significant viewpoints or discoveries that have emerged within the past ten years. (If you intend to discuss trends, however, it may also be appropriate to mention older research or theories.)

- What is already known about this issue? State facts or conclusions, with evidence from the literature.
- What is contested? Identify conflicting theories or contradictory approaches to your topic.
- What is unknown? Identify gaps in the current research.

## Method

Some flexibility is allowed when writing a method section for a project. In this respect a project differs from a thesis, which must follow APA format. (But a project method section is not necessarily easier to write.)

Despite variations in organization and content, the goal of every method section remains the same. It must answer the question:

*How will you examine the proposed issue?*

Describe how your project will be performed or implemented. Be concise.

- Example 1. "Based on an actual case, we characterize common behavioral symptoms and describe a strategy for selecting evidence-based nonpharmacologic dementia treatments" (Gitlin, Kales, & Lyketsos, 2012).
- Example 2. "We use 2 clinical cases with contrasting outcomes to demonstrate how this framework can help resolve common dilemmas" (Smith, Lo, & Sudore, 2013, p. 1241).

*Identify the resources and materials required:*

- Materials: What will you need to produce your desired result?
- Justification: Why are these resources necessary?
- Procedure: How will these resources be used to analyze the data or create an end product?
- Procurement: Where can these resources be found?

The content areas listed below may become sub-sections within your method section. Use of sub-headings and sub-sections is recommended, because it enhances the flow of the paper and makes the content more accessible to the reader. It will also help you organize the subject matter!

*Discuss with your chair all possible content areas relevant to your project.  
Consider inclusion of the elements listed below:*

- Brief summary of your method
- Research design, including theories that guide your method
- Research setting
- Instruments used
- Manner of data collection, including:
  - Interviews
  - Surveys
- Procedures and permissions
- Investigator qualifications
- Program planning and development, including:
  - Collaborations
  - Timelines
- Development of forms and/or surveys for participants
- Process for developing PowerPoint, curricula, or literature
- Plans for recruitment of participants and for marketing your project, if applicable

*For any project involving participants, you should also describe the characteristics of the target group and the process of selection:*

- Characteristics of the target population
  - Age range
  - Sex
  - Educational level
  - Ethnicity
- Process of participant selection
  - Goals of sample selection
    - Sample size
    - Representative sample
  - Eligibility criteria
  - Recruitment process

*(Specific) Procedures:*

- Describe the materials, instruments, and/or equipment to be used.
- Describe how these resources will be used.
- If applicable, describe Institutional Review Board approval process
- If applicable, describe how your procedure differs from existing procedures, i.e., how it will produce an end product that differs from those already available.

## **Results/Discussion**

This section describes your project's outcomes. It also discusses its usefulness and potential for further development.

*State your results.*

Describe your end product or your findings.

- Example 1. Smith A. K., Lo, B., & Sudore R. (2013) created a decision-making tool. (See Appendix to view their algorithm.) They introduced the tool in the following manner: "This framework relies on conversations between the physician and the surrogate to ascertain the patient's values and thinking during advance care planning, and as such is most appropriate for cases where a surrogate is available. If a surrogate is not available, factors beyond the scope of this paper, such as the clarity of previously expressed wishes or the presence of an appointed conservator, will need to be considered and an ethics committee or consultant may need to be involved."
- Example 2. Johannessen et al. (2015) introduced the results of their participants' interviews: "The informants' experiences from the intervention are presented in two thematic categories. Each category includes a number of subcategories presenting different aspects of the categories (Table 4). Quotations from some interviews are presented to help the reader evaluate the credibility of the findings."

*What would be the steps beyond completion of your current project?*

Describe how your results could be applied, developed, evaluated, and/or marketed.

## Conclusions

The conclusion section is more than a reiteration of the research findings. This section sums up the outcomes of the study and then discusses the implications of the study. The implications could reside at the theoretical, empirical or policy levels.

- Summarize your outcome(s).
- Describe the ways in which your results modify or add to the existing literature.
- Identify the theoretical or policy implications of these findings.
- Describe the directions that future research could take.

## References

Your APA-formatted references belong here. Please note the two types of APA-accepted doi citation in the references below.

Amariglio, R. E., Donohue, M. C, Marshall, G. A., Rentz, D. M., Salmon, D. P, Ferris, S. H., Karantzoulis, S.

Aisen, P. S., Sperling, R. A., & Alzheimer's Disease Cooperative Study (2015). Tracking early decline in cognitive function in older individuals at risk for Alzheimer's disease dementia: the Alzheimer's Disease Cooperative Study Cognitive Function Instrument. *JAMA Neurology*, *72*, 446–454. doi: 10.1001/jamaneurol.2014.3375.

Gitlin, L. N., Kales, H. C., & Lyketsos, C. G. (2012). Nonpharmacologic management of behavioral symptoms in dementia. *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, *308*, 2020-2029.

Hudson, P. L., Remedios, C., & Thomas, K. (2010). A systematic review of psychosocial interventions for family caregivers of palliative care patients. *BMC Palliative Care*, *9*, 17-22. doi: 10.1186/1472-684X-9-17

Johannessen, A., Bruvik, F. K., & Hauge, S. (2015). Family carers' experiences of attending a multicomponent psychosocial intervention program for carers and persons with dementia. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare*, *8*, 91-99. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2147/JMDH.S76093>

Pongan, E., Freulon, M., Delphin-Combe, F., Dibie-Racoupeau, F., Martin-Gaujard, G., Federico, D., Waissi, A., Richard, G., Jacqueline, S., Fabre, F., Trombert-Paviot, B., Krolak-Salmon, P., Laurent, B., & Rouch, I. (2014). Initial and long-term evaluation of patients with Alzheimer's after hospitalization in cognitive and behavioural units: the EVITAL study design. *BMC Psychiatry*, *14*, 308-313. doi: 10.1186/s12888-014-0308-6

Smith A. K., Lo, B., & Sudore R. (2013). When previously expressed wishes conflict with best interests. *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 1241-1245. doi: 10.1001/jamainternmed.2013.6053

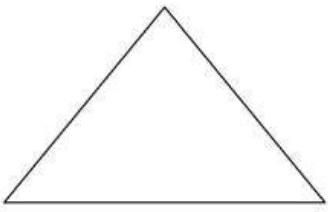
## Appendix (optional)

Here you may include supplemental material (e.g., resource guides, detailed descriptions of assessment and/or evaluation tools).

Example: A decision-making tool devised by Smith & Sudore (2013).

***A Framework for Weighing  
Previously Expressed Preferences vs. Best Interests***

1. Is the clinical situation an emergency that allows no time for deliberation? Is there a clear code status order?	Emergency and DNAR* or specific code status order present	Non-emergency OR Emergency but no specific code status order†
2. In view of the patient's values and goals, how likely will the benefits of the intervention outweigh the burdens?	Benefits weak or unlikely Burdens strong or likely	Benefits strong and likely Burdens weak and unlikely
3. How well does the advance directive fit situation at hand?	Fits well	Poor fit
4. How much leeway did the patient provide the surrogate for overriding the advance directive?	No leeway	Leeway
5. How well does the surrogate represent the patient's best interests?	Poorly, or surrogate represents own interest	Represents patient's best interests well
	<b>Favors previously expressed preferences</b>	<b>Favors current best interests</b>



\* Abbreviation: DNAR=Do Not Attempt Resuscitate.

†In the absence of an unambiguous order prohibiting life sustaining treatment, in an emergency the best interests of the patient are to prolong life until there is time for deliberation.