Proposal Writing: Taking the Guesswork Out

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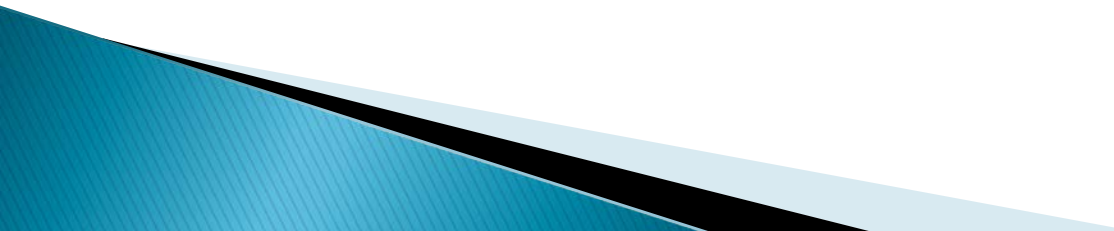Student Workshop, Congress, University of Victoria, June 3, 2013

CASC ACÉC
Canadian Association for Studies in Co-operation
L'Association Canadienne pour les Études sur la Cooperation

Overview

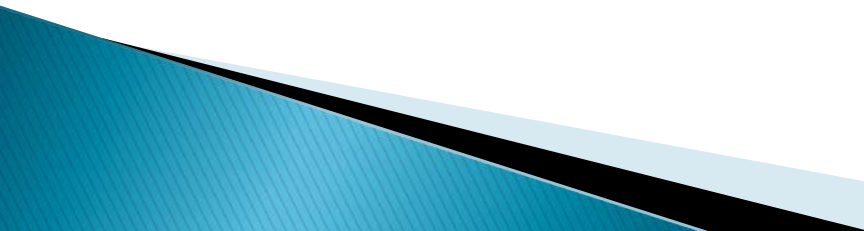- Where and how to get started

- How proposals work
 (and for whom)

- What parts are needed

- How parts combine for
  maximum effect

Where to start?
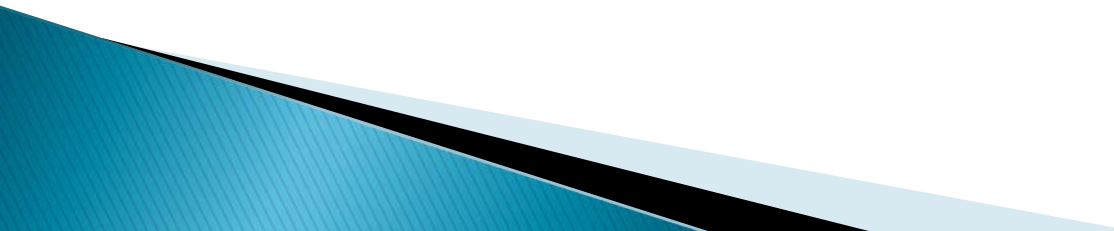
- Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.—Zora Neale Hurston

- Get and take advice

- Talk to those who have written theses

- Review examples

- Read, read, read

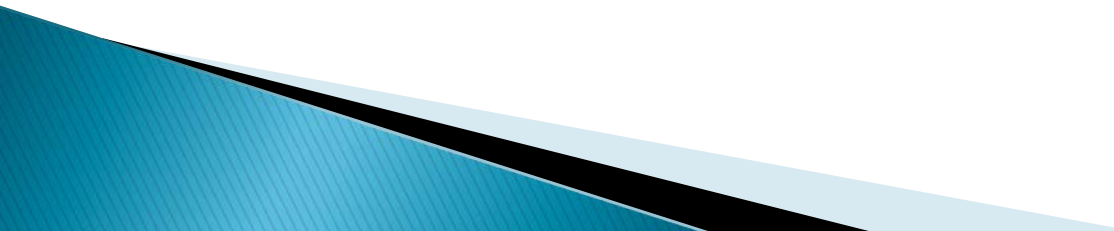- Talk to those who have supervised theses

- Try out ideas; you are not alone!

Questions Proposals Answer

- **What** research problem will you solve?
- **Why** is it important?
- **How** are you going to solve it?
- **What** exactly will you provide?
- **When** will you complete the work?
- **Where** will the study be completed?

Project Feasibility

- Should be done

- Can be done by you

- Can be done within thesis timelines and format limits

Proposal Parts

- Title
- Introduction/ Background
- Research question
- Rationale for the research project
- Literature review
- Theoretical framework
- Methodology
- Methods
- Plan of Work
- References

(Working) Title

- Orient readers to the research topic

- Indicate the kind of study

Introduction/Background

- Locates your work in the territory

- Puts it in conversation with existing literature

- Clarifies scope, purpose, and overview

- Establishes study significance

- Creates a niche

- Engages the reader

Example

- My research on identity and development is innovative because it brings together analysis of national discourses about Indians with a study of the practices and choices of the individual Indians whose identities are at issue. I believe this research can be helpful to the nation, development agencies, and indigenous organizations as Bolivia works out what a multicultural identity will mean for its people. I am particularly committed to sharing the results of my analysis with the Guaraní people with whom I work, in the hopes that my work will not just be an extraction of truths, but will give them information with which they can better control their lives and resources.
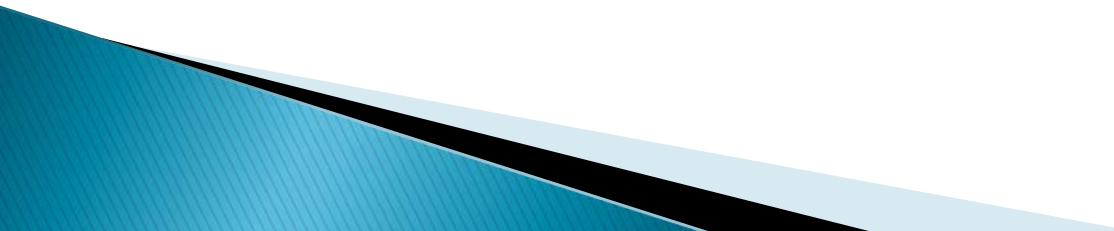
- http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/DissPropWorkshop/examples/PosteroFulb.pdf

Table 1

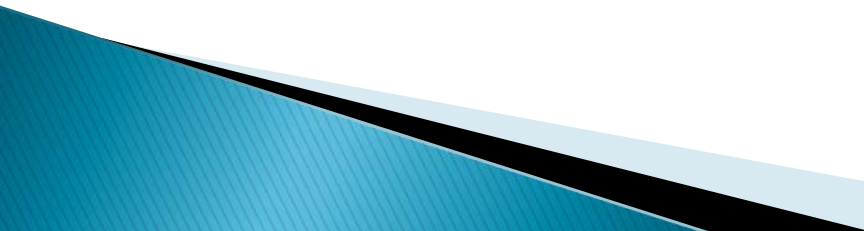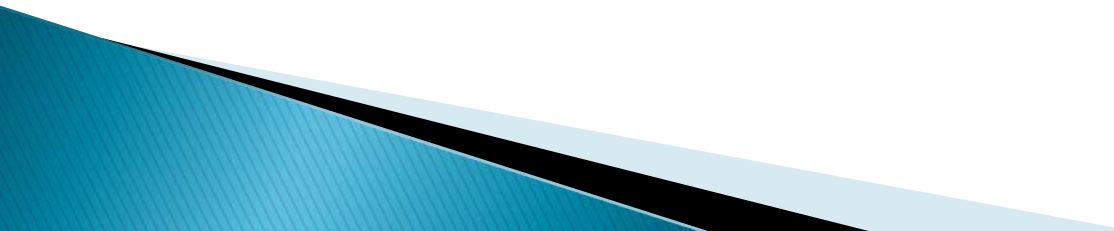| Epistemology	Theoretical perspective	Methodology	Methods
Objectivism Constructionism Subjectivism (and their variants)	Positivism (and post-positivism) Interpretivism • Symbolic Interactionism • Phenomenology • Hermeneutics Critical inquiry Feminism Postmodernism etc.	Experimental research Survey research Ethnography Phenomenological research Grounded theory Heuristic inquiry Action research Discourse analysis Feminist standpoint research etc.	Sampling Measurement and scaling Questionnaire Observation • participant • non-participant Interview Focus group Case study Life history Narrative Visual ethnographic methods Statistical analysis Data reduction Theme identification Comparative analysis Cognitive mapping Interpretative methods Document analysis Content analysis Conversation analysis etc.

Research Question

- What question sparked your interest in the topic?
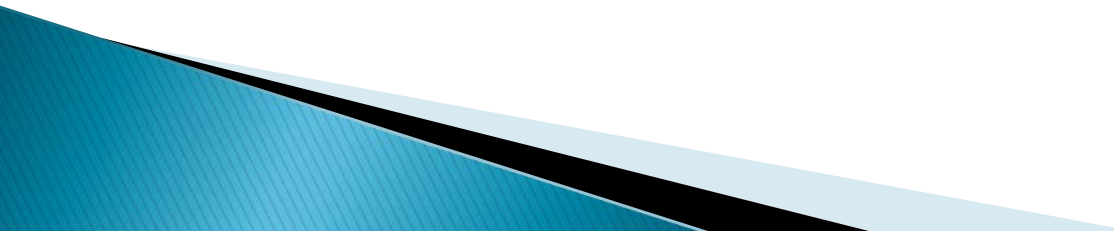
- What do you aim to argue?

- Why?

Developing the question(s)

- The research explores (a) how effectively the community enterprise model animates innovation that can strengthen and sustain community and (b) how we can best measure the impacts and outcomes of their innovations to produce knowledge, frameworks, and tools applicable to urban centres across Canada and internationally.

- ·   How effective is the community enterprise centre model in animating innovation to strengthen and sustain community?

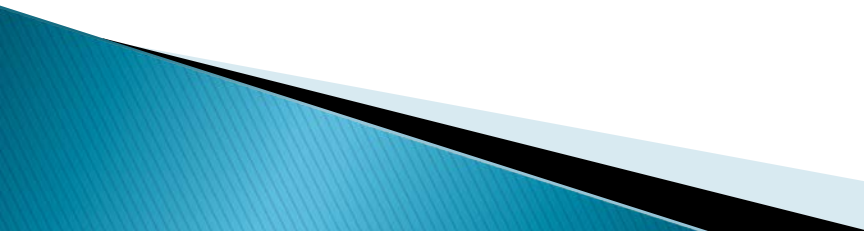- ·   How can we best measure the impacts of Station 20 West?

Rationale

- Explain
  - Why the topic is important
  - What is missing in the literature
  - What you can bring to the topic
  - How your approach will solve a problem
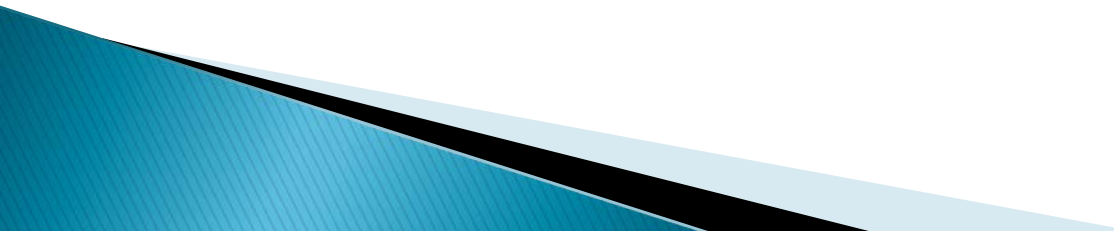 - What new research opportunities your study will create

Literature Review

- Situates your research within the broader field
- Expands on Introduction
- Shows your familiarity with relevant literature
- Has a critical relation to the literature
- Establishes space for your project
- Shows what has been covered and not
- Clarifies how others have addressed the topic
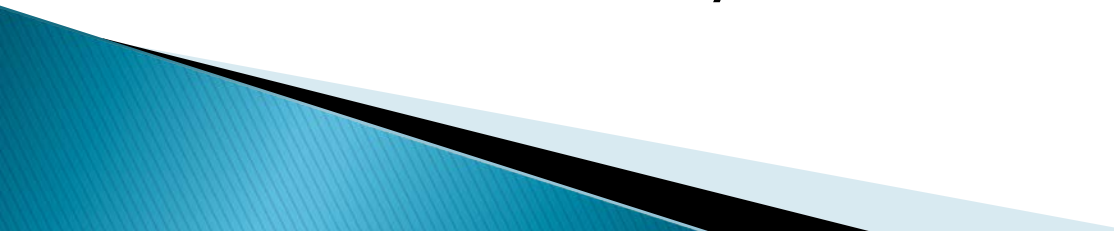- Explains why your methodology makes sense

Theoretical framework

▸ Theory is always a (necessary) detour on the way to something more important.--Hall, 1991

▸ What assumptions (about reality and researcher relation to it) guide your work? Why?

▸ How does the researcher understand knowledge and how we come to know and understand what we do?

▸ Why should readers take the research seriously? (Crotty, 1998).

▸ How do these relate to your theoretical framework? What is your perspective on the social world and your assumptions about language, communication, and individual and community identity (Crotty, 1998).
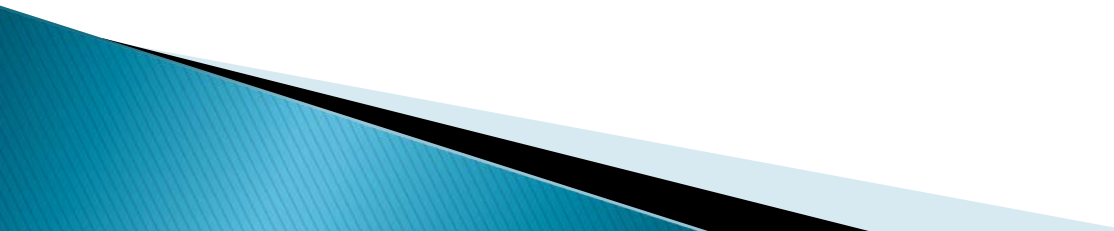
▸ What does your theoretical framework enable?

Key Operating Assumptions

▸ Categories of knowledge are neither natural nor neutral.

▸ Language and literature are social and not "purely" linguistic or aesthetic categories.

▸ What and how we read (and speak) are central to cultures and communities.

▸ Identities are produced discursively, not pre-given.

▸ If identities can be constructed, they can be reconstructed.

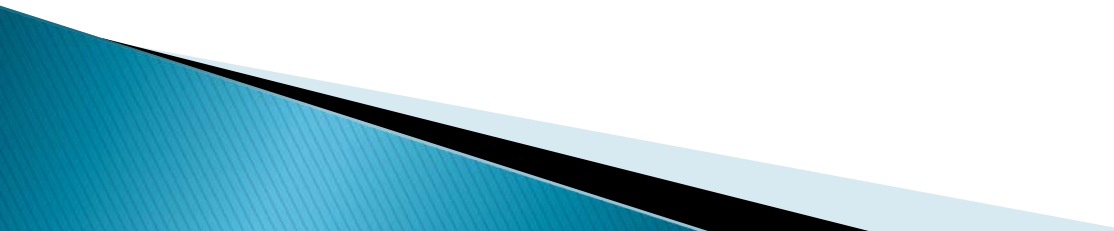▸ If things are not just the way they are, they can be changed.

Methodology

- Qualitative or quantitative?

- Survey?

- Action research?

- Ethnography?

- Discourse analysis?

- Grounded theory?

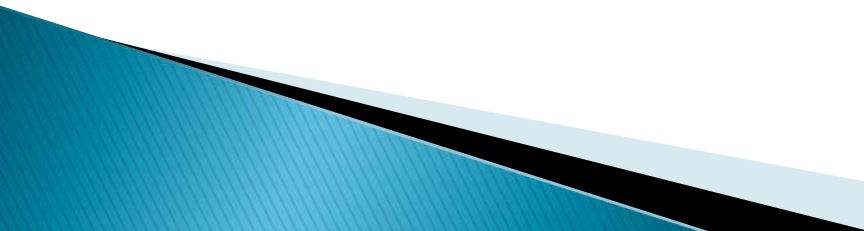# Methods

- Mixed methods?

- Case study? Questionnaires? Focus groups? Interviews?

- Visual (mapping, photography, video)? Archival?

- Observation, narrative, document analysis?

- Participant selection?
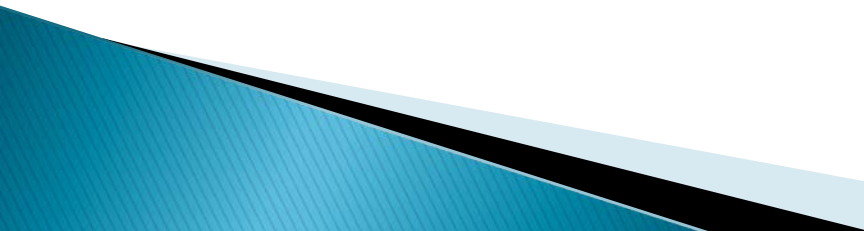
- Analysis and interpretation?

- Limitations?

Plan of Work

▸ Timelines detailing completion dates for thesis parts

▸ Show you are realistic about time for research design, ethics approval, travel, site/personnel access, data collection, analysis and interpretation, drafting, redrafting, revising, editing, proofreading

References

- Good writing is good research

- Follow disciplinary conventions

- Include all sources cited (check against body)

How Good Writers Write

- Know that the first draft will not be perfect
- Write regularly
- Break big jobs into small chunks
- Have clear goals focused on purpose and audience
- Have several strategies to choose from
- Use rules flexibly
- Wait to edit until after the draft is complete

Persuasive Power

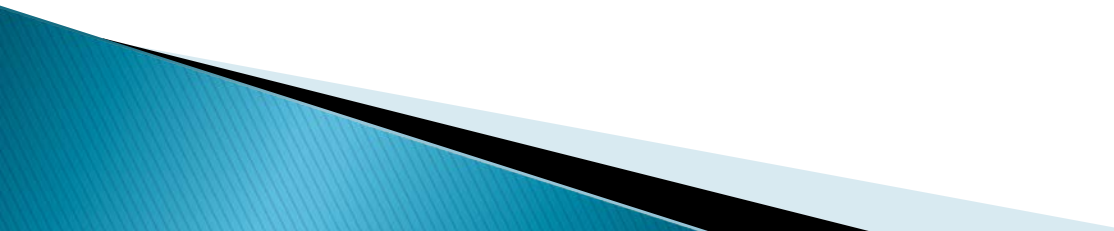▶ Be persuasive and realistic

▶ Good proposal writing follows the 8 Cs of success:
  ◦ Gets results (clear, complete, correct)
  ◦ Saves reader's time (concise, concrete)
  ◦ Builds goodwill (conversational, courteous, constructive)

Words to Cut   Locker & Findlay, 2012 67

Cut these words	Cut redundant words	Substitute single words for phrases	
Quite Really Very	~~a period of~~ three months during ~~the course of~~ negotiations during ~~the year of~~ 2012 maximum ~~possible~~ ~~past~~ experience plan ~~in advance~~ refer ~~back~~ ~~true~~ facts	~~at the present time~~ ~~due to the fact that~~ ~~in the event that~~ ~~in the near future~~ ~~prior to the start of~~ ~~on a regular basis~~	now because if soon (or give the date) before regularly

Designing

Locker & Findlay, 2012

- Makes information accessible & useful
- Clarifies organization
- Creates hierarchies
- Uses paragraphs, headings, enhanced text, lists,
- Creates success

Are proposals written in stone?

- Show you can think
- Show you can write
- Show you can design and develop a project
- Most revisit, rethink, adjust to new realities
- Show you are flexible and nimble