

First, the proposal must specify the research operations you will undertake and the way you will interpret the results of these operations in terms of your central problem. Do not just tell what you mean to achieve, tell how you will spend your time while doing it. Second, a methodology is not just a list of research tasks but an argument as to why these tasks add up to the best attack on the problem. An agenda by itself will normally not suffice because the mere listing of tasks to perform does not prove that they add up to the best feasible approach.

Note – This discussion of method and data is orthogonal to the debate between positivists and interpretivists. *Any* piece of empirical social science – whether its goal is to test a causal argument or to recover the meaning of the actors involved – requires methods and data.

VI. CONDUCT THE ANALYSIS

This will be the heart and – typically – the largest section of what will eventually become your MA paper. This is where everything comes together. You do not just tell a story; rather, you relate an analytically driven one. The point is not to inundate the reader with tons of information. Instead, you marshal and present evidence in a disciplined way to make a plausible case for your argument.

In this section, it is important that you always ‘hold the reader’s hand.’ That is, do not assume he/she has some fifth sense and will magically figure out your (implicit) argument in page after page of text. Rather, your argument should be *explicit* throughout the narrative and, indeed, should guide and discipline it.

Somewhere in this section, it is usually a good practice ‘to think outside the box’ a bit. You like your argument, sure, but could a reasonable individual imagine other ways to tell the same story? Why is your story line better than his/hers? In the jargon, this is called considering ‘alternative explanations.’

VII. CONCLUDE BY LOOKING AHEAD, AS WELL AS BACK

Of course, a recap of your main argument and findings – and their relevance for policy, theory or both - should be given here. However, this should be brief. It is then better to use the conclusions to highlight remaining puzzles and challenges. What are the ‘where next’ questions in terms of policy, theory or data?

VIII. PROVIDE REFERENCES

Even at the stage of your draft research design proposal, the reference list should be extensive enough so your reader can see the policy-theory-disciplinary literatures within which you are situating your study.