

Reviewer Lens Checklist

How to Think Like an International Reviewer

When you write a research proposal, your most important audience is the reviewer. Reviewers are busy, often reading many proposals in a short time, and may not know your country, your discipline, or your research context. This checklist helps you write in a way that makes it easy for them to understand, trust, and score your proposal.

1. Can the reviewer understand your idea in 60 seconds?

- Is your abstract short, clear, and specific?
- Does the first paragraph explain the problem simply?
- Is the location clearly named (country, province, district)?
- Does the proposal avoid jargon, long sentences, and unnecessary theory?

2. Is the research problem clearly stated?

- Does the proposal explain why the problem matters?
- Have you included a few pieces of evidence (data, policy, earlier studies)?
- Would a reviewer outside your field understand the issue?

3. Are the aims and objectives realistic and linked?

- Aims are broad: What you intend to achieve.
- Objectives are specific: What you will *do*.
- Do the objectives match the available time, funding, and team capacity?

4. Do the methods match the aims and objectives?

- Is the design stated clearly (qualitative/quantitative/mixed)?
- Does the sampling plan sound achievable?
- Can the reviewer “see” how you will collect and analyse the data?
- Are ethical and cultural considerations included (translation, access, permissions)?

5. Is the proposal internally consistent?

Check alignment between:

- Aims ↔ Objectives
- Objectives ↔ Methods
- Methods ↔ Work Packages
- Work Packages ↔ Timeline
- Activities ↔ Budget

Everything should support everything else.

6. Have you shown feasibility and credibility?

- Does the timeline make sense for the work required?
- Are partner roles clear and believable?
- Have you acknowledged risks and offered realistic solutions?
- Does the team have access to the sites, communities, or data?

7. Is the writing easy to score?

- Good headings
- Bullet points
- Short paragraphs
- Plain English
- Clear progression of ideas
- Key points first, details after

8. Does the budget look reasonable and connected to the plan?

- Every cost links to a task.
- Amounts are realistic.
- No unnecessary or unexplained items.
- Value for Money is clear.

9. Does the proposal finish strong?

- Clear outcomes
- Logical contribution to knowledge or practice
- Convincing statement of importance
- Confidence that the project can be delivered

Abstract Writing Template

A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing a Clear, Strong Research Abstract

An abstract is the “shopfront” of your research proposal. Reviewers often read it first and decide their confidence level in under a minute. Use this template to structure a strong, simple abstract.

1. State the Research Problem (2–3 sentences)

- What issue are you studying?
- Why is it important?
- Who is affected?
- Why does it matter *now*?

2. Give the Specific Location / Context (1 sentence)

- Name the country, region, district, community, or institution.
- Avoid general terms like “Southeast Asia” or “developing countries.”

3. State the Aim of the Study (1 sentence)

- What is the main thing your research wants to find out?
- Use clear aims such as “to evaluate,” “to examine,” “to identify,” “to assess.”

4. Outline the Methods (2–3 sentences)

Describe:

- Study design (qualitative, quantitative, mixed)
- Sampling (who, where, how many)
- Data collection (interviews, surveys, focus groups, documents, sensors)
- Data analysis (statistical tests, coding, thematic analysis)

5. Describe the Population (1 sentence)

- Be specific: Which participants? Which groups? Which demographics?

6. State the Expected Contribution (2 sentences)

What will your study add or change?

- Impact on policy
- Impact on practice
- New evidence
- Benefits for communities

7. Combine All Sections into One Short Paragraph

This should be approximately:

- 5–7 sentences
- 120–150 words
- Clear, simple English

Use your notes above to construct your full abstract.