



# Writing Effective Research Proposals

*WTO/ESCAP 6<sup>th</sup> ARTNeT Capacity Building Workshop on Trade Research  
Vientiane, Lao PDR - 21-25 June 2010*

Presented by:  
Melanie Ramjoué  
Trade and Investment Division, UNESCAP  
Bangkok, Thailand  
Email: ramjoue@un.org

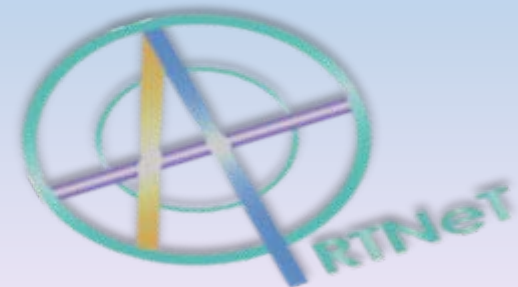


Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade

[www.artnetontrade.org](http://www.artnetontrade.org)

# Outline

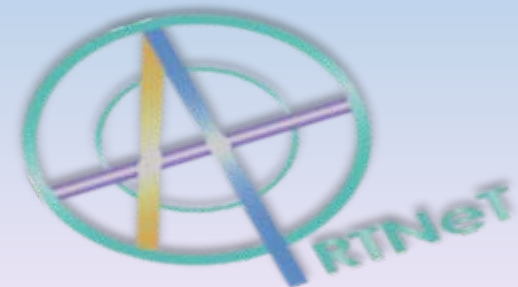
- Basics of Writing a Research Proposal
- Structure of a Proposal
  - Introduction
  - Research Question
  - Literature Review
  - Methodology
  - Expected Results and Limitations



# The Basics

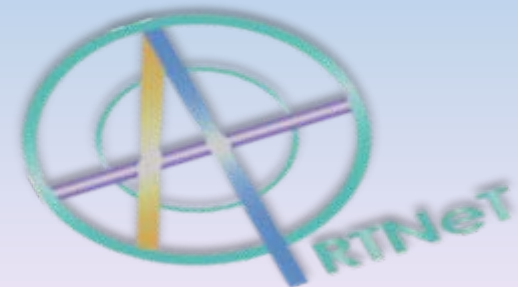
The main goals of a research proposal are:

- 1) **Show that you have a worthwhile research project**
  - a. Situation
  - b. Research Question
  
- 2) **Show that you have the competence and the work-plan to complete it**
  - a. Literature Review
  - b. Methodology



# Outline of a Research Proposal

- Introduction
- Research Question
- Literature Review
- Methodology
- Expected Results and Limitations



Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade

[www.artnetontrade.org](http://www.artnetontrade.org)

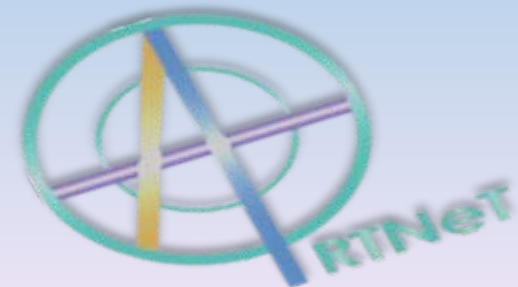
# Follow the submission guidelines – a general rule is: keep it short!

- Introduction → 1 page
- Research Question → 3 lines
- Literature Review → 1 page
- Methodology → 1 page
- Expected Results → 1 paragraph
- Limitations → 1 paragraph
- References → 1/2 page
- TOTAL → 3-5 pages

# Introduction

## Situation

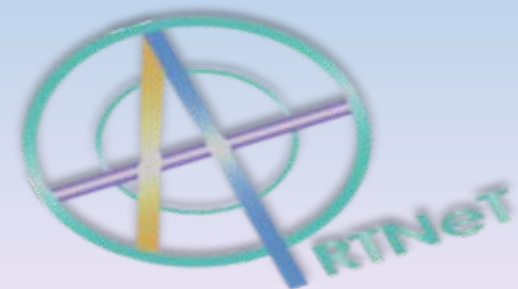
- Get straight to the point - avoid generalizations (e.g. “*The study of climate change is becoming increasingly important in this day and age.*”)
- Include only facts, data and numbers that impact the topic you are studying.



# Introduction (cont.)

## Problem

- Give evidence to show there is a problem
- Or show there is a lack of research on the topic



Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade

[www.artnetontrade.org](http://www.artnetontrade.org)

## *Example*

Situation

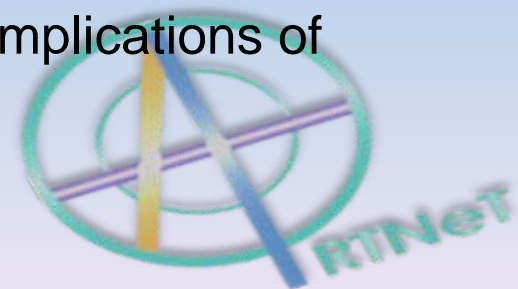
All Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) economies are members of regional free trade agreements (FTAs), including, most recently, the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area.

Problem

To date, little research has been carried out into the environmental implications of FTAs in the GMS.

Research  
Question

What are the environmental implications of the ASEAN-China FTA?



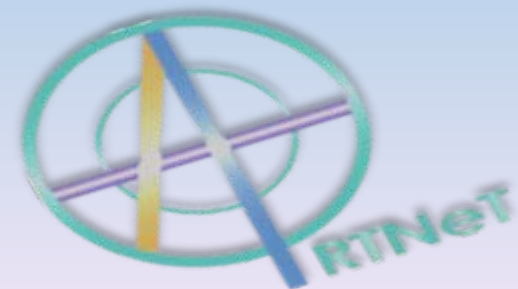
**Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade**

[www.artnetontrade.org](http://www.artnetontrade.org)



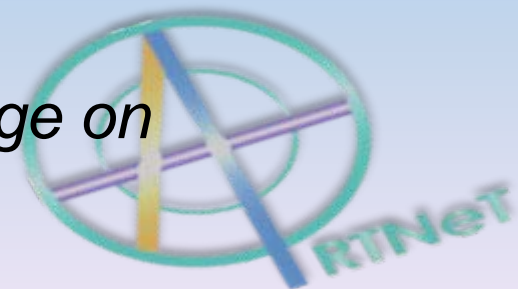
# The Research Question

- “A question well asked is a question half answered.”
- Ask simple, answerable questions



# The Research Question cont.

- Limit the scope of your research:
  - Don't tackle multiple research projects in one study.
  - Be realistic—what can you accomplish in this study?
  - E.g. “*What are the impacts of climate change?*”
- Stay on topic
  - A trade research paper should focus on trade (not science or macroeconomics)
  - E.g. “*What is the effect of climate change on aquaculture?*”



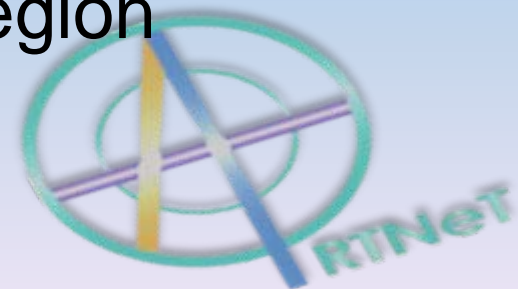
# The Research Question (cont.)

- Tips for Limiting the Scope
  - By geography
  - By identifying a gap in the existing literature
  - By policy needs
  - By thinking through time and cost constraint
  - By considering the available info/data



# Example (1)

- Examining the impacts of climate change on trade →
- Examining the impacts of climate change on trade flows in the Asia-Pacific region →
- Assessing the risk of climate-change related disruptions to supply, transport and distribution chains in the Greater Mekong Subregion

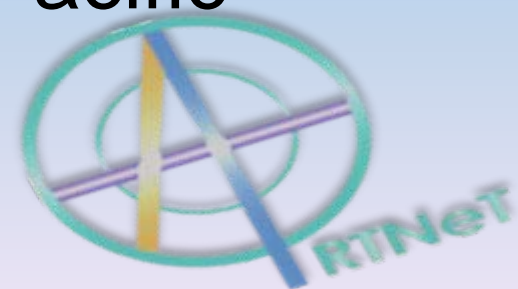


[Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade](http://www.artnetontrade.org)

[www.artnetontrade.org](http://www.artnetontrade.org)

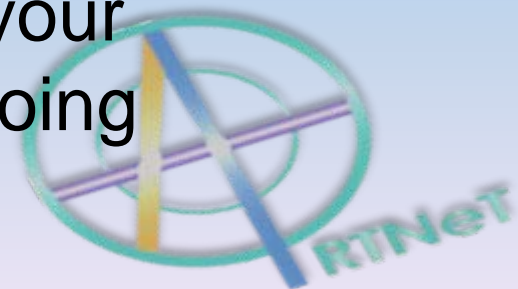
# Example (2)

- What are the linkages between climate change and the services sector? →
- How will climate change likely impact the tourism sector? →
- How will the projected rising sea levels affect the tourism sector in the Pacific Islands?



# Literature Review

- Provides the background and context for the research problem
- Proves that your proposed research is necessary
- Demonstrates that you are already knowledgeable about the area
- Provides the “jumping-off” point for your research topic within the larger, ongoing research area



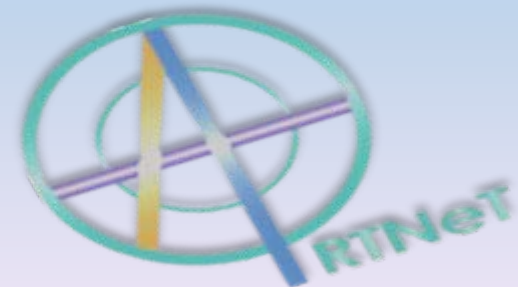
# Literature Review Citations

- Citations are important - they prove that you have done background research and are able to discern between good and bad sources
- Use the same citation format throughout
- See reference slide for links to citation websites



# Methodology

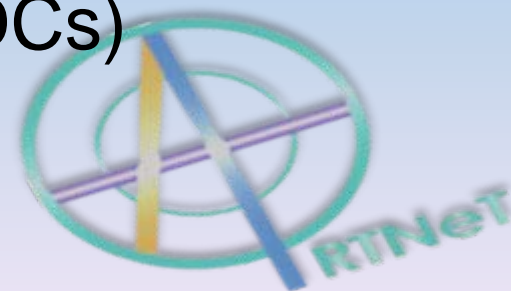
- Explain in detail your source of information (**data**) and the **analytical method** you will use to answer your research question





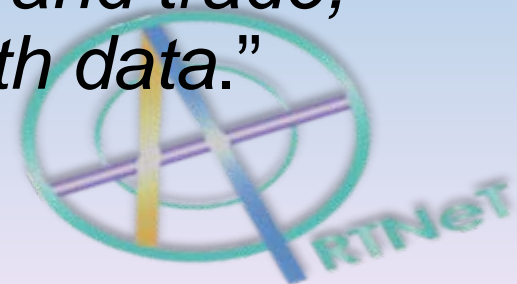
# Data

- For **primary** data: explain the data collection instrument (survey, interview, etc.) and method (sample size, etc.)
- For **secondary** data: detail the source (e.g. COMTRADE) and availability of data (e.g. outline limited data availability for LDCs)



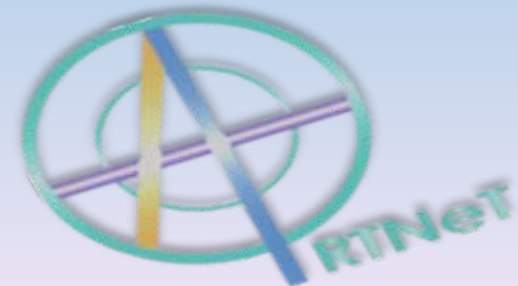
# Analytical method

- Outline the methodology you plan to use to analyze the data
- Be as specific as possible; include relevant analytical form (e.g. mathematical model, regression)
- E.g. *“I will build a theoretical model involving the environment, human capital, growth, and trade, and will test the model empirically with data.”*



# Expected Results and Limitations

- What results do you think will come from your research?
- Limitations – explain how your research results are likely to be limited (e.g. by geography, by country, by product)



# Other elements to add

- Include other relevant information requested in the submission guidelines:
  - Timeline
  - Budget
  - Team composition
- List of references (include weblinks where possible)

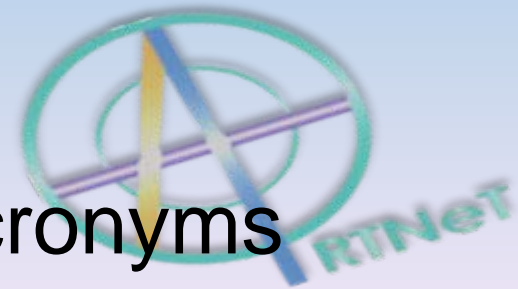


[Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade](http://www.artnetontrade.org)

[www.artnetontrade.org](http://www.artnetontrade.org)

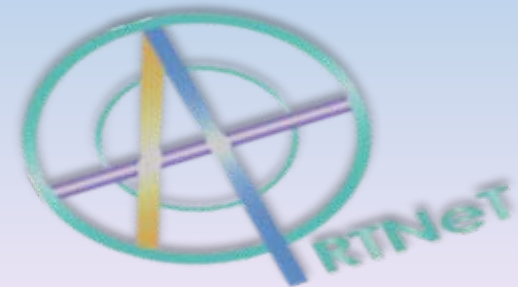
# Before Submitting Your Proposal...

- Be aware of your strengths and weaknesses → ask for help to improve your proposal in those areas
- Format your proposal:
  - edit and spell-check
  - check consistency of font, capitalization and use of acronyms



# Orally Presenting Research Proposals

- Use the same format for your oral presentation as for your written proposal
- Practice out loud to a colleague or friend and time yourself



# References

- Pajares, Frank (2007). “*The Elements of a Proposal.*”  
<http://www.des.emory.edu/mfp/proposal.html>.
- United Nations Library Network. “*Grant Proposal writing Guidelines.*”  
<http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/sflib/libmgnt/grantproposals.htm>



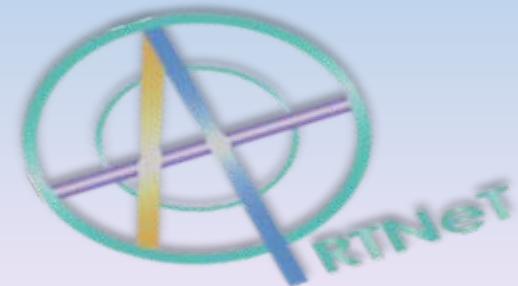
# Links to Citation Styles

- Modern Language Association format

<http://www.academicexperts.us/dl/mla12.pdf>

- Chicago Manual of Style format

[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)



[Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade](http://www.artnetontrade.org)

[www.artnetontrade.org](http://www.artnetontrade.org)