

Guidance on writing a PhD research project proposal

A PhD research project proposal should clearly outline the issues to be researched and their importance, theoretical and methodological approaches, primary sources to be analyzed and personal ability to undertake the research.

In constructing a Research Proposal there are three important global rules:

- 1 Write a complete paragraph for every section listed below (except for the title!).
- 2 Do not repeat information already covered in any previous section.
- 3 Do not write more than two sides of A4 paper, and use a font no smaller than Times New Roman 12.

The proposal is likely to contain all or most of the following:

- a short literature review and including academic references
- an identification of gaps in theory and empirical work, from which the research questions should be generated
- a proposed research method and an explanation of why this method is the appropriate one with which to address the research question
- an indication of your own experience in the field of the proposed research, how the research interest links up with your previous activities, and what special skills (language, access to sources, analytical methods) you possess to conduct the proposed research.

Your research project proposal should consist of the following:

Title

Make your title precise and descriptive. First write a working title. Then write the proposal. Then revise the title to reflect the project you've described, if necessary.

Research Questions

Write this section by completing the two statements below:

- 1 The aim of this research is to
State in one or two sentences what you aim to investigate by undertaking the research. Don't use this space to justify your research as this will be covered in the Research Context section.
- 2 This requires that the following research questions be investigated:
(A).. (B) ...(C) ... etc ...
Arrange your questions in a way that logically leads to a comprehensive investigation of your stated aim.

Research Context

Here summarise the state of the research pertinent to each of your research questions. Include any research that you have already done that is relevant to the new project. Clearly state how your proposed research can build upon or call into question work already done. You may need to repeat this structure for each of your research questions or you might break this into two sections, the first on the state of research and the second on how your proposed research affects the state of research.

Research Sources and Methods

This section explains what materials you will examine and how you will proceed in examining them in order to answer your research questions stated above. You should indicate the limits of your project (for example, in terms of chronology, geography, genre). If you've clearly written the previous sections you won't need to, nor should you, restate the research questions here. Instead, following the order of your research questions – now arranged to articulate the steps that you will take to carry out your project – carefully identify the sources relevant to answering your first research question and what ways you will be investigating those sources that will enable you to answer your questions. Either repeat until you've covered all your questions or, if the same sources are relevant to answering each question, write one section on the sources and then another section explain how they are used and what methods of inquiry are relevant to using them to answer each of your research questions in turn. Along the way identify for yourself from which disciplines the various methods you are using stem and the relative importance of each method to your project. Then you can either bring out the interdisciplinary nature of the project as you explain your approach question by question or, if you have space left, you can summarize the interdisciplinary scope in a final sentence.