



Need a little help? – Hints and tips on writing your PhD proposal.

This short guide aims to assist you to write a good research proposal. It is intended to help you to think about your proposed PhD research in a clear, structured and meaningful way. It should be stressed that the following is only a guide and it **does not** guarantee acceptance onto a PhD programme.

Why a good research proposal is essential to the application process

Your research proposal is an integral part of the PhD application process, so it is certainly worth investing time and energy into it. It needs to outline the nature of your proposed PhD study and give some indication of how you will conduct your research. Remember that a research proposal is about what **you** want to study; it immediately reflects your initial understanding of, and commitment to, PhD study. That said, the University has identified several Research themes, which will take priority, please refer to our main research page on the website for this information.

You are not expected to be the expert

Remember, you do not need to have a PhD to write a research proposal! Your proposal should be indicative and it should **outline** your areas of interest and your general insight into the research topic. You are **not** expected to be an expert and to be familiar with all the specific details of your subject. However, you are expected to have a good level of knowledge about the subject and where you might make a valuable contribution to research.

7 steps to a successful research proposal

A research proposal should generally include **six** main sections, as detailed below:

1) A clear working title for your research project

- what will you call your project?
- what key words would describe your proposal?

2) A clear statement about what you want to work on and why it is important, interesting, relevant and realistic. Ideally identify 3-5 questions that would guide the study

- what are your main research objectives? – these could be articulated as hypotheses, propositions, research questions, or problems to solve
- what difference do you think your research will make?
- why does this research excite you?
- what research ‘gaps’ will you be filling by undertaking your project?
- how might your research ‘add value’ to the subject?
- is your research achievable in the time allocated? (e.g. 3 years full-time, 6 years part-time)

3) Some background knowledge and context of the area in which you wish to work, including key literature, key people, key research findings

- how does your work link to the work of others in the same or related fields?
- would your work support or contest the work of others?
- how does your work relate to the expertise within the department you are applying to?

4) Some consideration of the methods/approach you might use

- how will you conduct your research?
- will you use existing theories, new methods/approaches or develop new methods/approaches?
- how might you design your project to get the best results/findings?

5) Some indication of the strategy and timetable for your research project and any research challenges you may face

- what would be the main stages of your project?
- what would you be expecting to do in each year of your PhD?
- what challenges might you encounter and how might you overcome these?

6) A list of the key references which support your research proposal

- references should be listed in the appropriate convention for your subject area (e.g. Harvard). Such references should be used throughout your research proposal to demonstrate that you have read and understood the work of others.
- other relevant material that you are aware of, but not actually used in writing your proposal, can also be added as a bibliography~

7) Identify the potential benefits of the research to the wider community;

The appropriate length of a research proposal

A good research proposal should be no more than 10 pages. Remember that it is meant to be an accurate overview, not a thesis, so you need to provide enough detail for the reader to understand it.