

Writing a PhD Proposal

You are interested in applying for our PhD programme? Excellent- we look forward to receiving your application. As part of the application process, you will need to submit a research proposal for your PhD project with a **word limit of 1,500 words** (excl. references). The quality of your proposal is a *significant* factor for the success of your application, so take your time to carefully craft it. The following general guidelines will help you to compose a proposal. They are no guarantee for acceptance onto the PhD programme, but they will support you in your efforts.

In general, your PhD proposal should demonstrate that:

- you have an original and intellectually interesting project idea;
- you are capable of critical analysis;
- you are knowledgeable about your subject and have some knowledge of the key academic debates and scholarly work relevant for your project (you don't have to be an expert yet);
- the project is focused and feasible within the limited time period of a PhD project;
- you can communicate your ideas clearly.

When writing your proposal, please consider the following guidelines. Each PhD project is different in nature, and the project is your project. Writing a convincing proposal therefore demonstrates to the reader that you are capable of PhD study and leadership at this early stage. Depending on the specificities of your project, you might want to follow these guidelines closely or rather compare your existing proposal against it in order to reflect carefully on its quality.

1. A clear idea and working title

- Early in the proposal, you should briefly and clearly explain what your project is about.
- The title should reflect the project's topic.

2. Purpose, key objectives & relevance of research project

- Explain the main idea behind the research: what is the intellectual puzzle you are interested in studying? What is the central research question?
- Explain the major aims and objectives of the project (e.g., what do you want to demonstrate/critically assess/question/challenge?)
- Outline why you consider this research to be important/necessary (relevance to the academic field and, if applicable, to the sociopolitical world). What is its potential impact of this project and for which audiences (e.g. academia, policy-makers, civil society etc)?

3. Context and background knowledge

- Outline how the topic of your project relates to 'the state of the field', i.e. how you would locate it in the existing academic literature.
- Demonstrate an initial understanding of the major debates and/or some specific works which are closely linked to your topic. Include bibliographical references as appropriate.
- Explain how your project contributes to the existing literature, how it criticizes and disagrees with it and how it builds upon existing work.
- Identify the links you see between the Department's research agenda and your topic.

4. Research Design and Methodology

- Outline the selection of cases/processes/people and your reasoning behind it.
- Explain which method(s) and approach(es) you will use to study your topic, and why. For example, will you conduct a comparative study, or analyze a single case study; will you apply an existing theoretical approach to a particular set of cases; will you interview individuals, conduct archival analysis or use an oral history approach? A rigorous methodology is an important component of a strong proposal.
- Attempt to address any concerns the readers might have about the feasibility of the project (e.g., with respect to the collection of data/access to sources/number of cases/lack of specific approach).

5. Timeline

- Briefly outline how you anticipate your project to unfold over the period of your PhD study. Provide the reader with a rough indication of the major stages of the project.

6. References

- Include a list of references to the work you will have referred to, or quoted, in the previous sections.

We hope these guidelines are helpful. Please also consult the Department's website for further information.