

Advice on writing a research proposal

A research proposal is a project outline of around 3,000 words which you write as part of the application process. We use it to assess the quality and originality of your ideas, whether you are able to think critically and whether you have a grasp of the relevant literature. It also gives us important information about the perspectives you intend to take on your research area, and how you fit into the Discipline Areas research profile overall. This is helpful when assigning a supervisor. We encourage you to discuss your proposal informally with a potential supervisor **BEFORE** making a formal application to ensure it is of mutual interest. Please note though that we cannot guarantee that we will be able to allocate you to the supervisor you initially contact and may allocate you to another expert in the area.

You will not be forced to follow the proposal exactly once you have started to study. It is normal for students to refine their original proposal, in light of detailed literature review, further consideration of research approaches and comments received from the supervisors (and other academic staff). With your application, it is vital that you enclose a sufficiently detailed research proposal outline. This must be structured as follows:

- **Title**
- **Overview of the research**
In this section you should provide a short overview of your research. You should also state how your research fits into the research priorities of the Discipline Area. Here you can refer to the research areas and priorities of a particular research grouping or supervisor. You must also state precisely why you have chosen to apply to the Discipline Area and how your research links into our overall profile.
- **Positioning of the research (approx. 900 words)**
This should reference the most important texts related to the research, demonstrate the candidate's understanding of the research issues, and identify existing gaps (both theoretical and practical) that the research is intended to address.
- **Research design & methodology (approx. 900 words)**
This section should identify the information that is necessary to carry out the analysis and the possible research techniques that could deliver the information.
- **References**

Pitfalls in writing research proposals

We often have to reject students who meet the academic qualifications required but have not produced a satisfactory research proposal. Our advice is:

- Make sure that your research idea, question or problem is very clearly stated and well grounded in academic research
- Make sure that your proposal is well focused and conforms exactly to the submission requirements described here. Poorly specified or rambling proposals will not convince us that you have a clear idea of what you want to do.

The following books are widely available from bookshops and libraries and may help in preparing your research proposal (as well as in doing your research degree):

- Bell, J. (1999): *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-time Researchers in Education & Social Science*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford).
- Baxter, L, Hughes, C. and Tight, M. (2001): *How to Research*, (Open University Press, Milton Keynes).
- Cryer, P. (2000): *The Research Student's Guide to Success*, (Open University, Milton Keynes).
- Delamont, S., Atkinson, P. and Parry, O. (1997): *Supervising the PhD*, (Open University Press, Milton Keynes).
- Philips, E. and Pugh, D. (2005): *How to get a PhD: A Handbook for Students and their Supervisors*, (Open University Press, Milton Keynes).