



GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A RESEACH PROPOSAL (Master's and Doctoral Qualifications)

A suitable research proposal is a pre-requisite for acceptance into a master's or doctoral programme. This document informs the respective faculty as regards the potential candidate's ability to complete the proposed research.

In this regard, the primary purpose of the research proposal is to provide information about the intended research project, in terms of content and methodology, in order to assess both the feasibility of the project and the intended modus operandi to be undertaken by the candidate in the months ahead, including the purpose of the desired mobility to another university.

A typical research proposal normally consists of the following sections:

1 Title Page:

- Surname and initials:
- Qualifications:
- Name of Degree:
- Name of School / Research Entity:
- Name of Faculty:
- Name of University:
- Contact number:
- E-mail address:
- Supervisor (if known):
- Co-supervisor/assistant supervisor (if any).

2 **Abstract:** The proposal should contain a suitable abstract of not more than 150 words. The abstract should focus on the structure of the proposal, and concisely summarise the major components of the research proposal.

3 **Working Title:** The title must be appropriate and concise and have impact (preferably not longer than 12 words). Omit superfluous phrases such as "an investigation into". If the title must be longer than 12 words, give a short main title with a longer subtitle. Be careful not to incorporate a conclusion into the title.

4 **Background to the Research:** The background to the research topic and an explanation of its significance. Give a general overview of the research terrain which ultimately informs the context of the envisaged research problem. State the theme of the investigation and put it into perspective by using the information gleaned from literature on the field of research. Indicate what the specific gap or lacuna in the present knowledge on the subject is, or indicate the area where a new contribution could be made.

- 5 **Problem Statement:** Clearly state the primary focus of the research project. This is normally written in the form of a question.
- 6 **Key Research Questions:** It is important that the research questions for which the proposed investigation aims to find an answer are explicitly formulated. These are sometimes referred to as the sub-problems. In this regard, ensure that collectively, the sub-problems encapsulate the import of the main Problem Statement.
- 7 **Detailed Literature Review:** Here, the candidate should develop a proposal which clearly demonstrates that he/she is thoroughly familiar with the debates and critical issues raised in a wide range of scholarly literature germane to the research topic. Moreover, the candidate needs to be able to exhibit mastery of all major lines of argument which have been expounded in the chosen discipline(s), and to verify a critical knowledge of key concepts and research outcomes by leading researchers working in that particular field(s). In this context, references to seminal publications must be given in order for the candidate to substantiate his/her degree of comprehension. As a doctorate is only awarded for original and significant research in a particular field(s) the candidate must use this opportunity to prove to what degree his/her chosen area of research is unique and noteworthy. In the case of a master's degree it is expected that the student will at the very least re-appropriate existing knowledge in a unique way in order to offer a specific discipline a fresh perspective.
- 8 **Importance of the Research:** The candidate should confirm by means of evaluative (not enumerative) reference to recent research (problems, disparities, unanswered questions or niches for creative development). It must be clear that the problem is at present unsolved or that there is a need or a possibility for new or meaningful development. The candidate needs to elucidate exactly why it is necessary to investigate the problem or to find an answer to the research question.
- 9 **Methodology:** Here, the candidate must demonstrate that he/she has a complete understanding of the possible methodological tools and approaches available (be they qualitative and/or quantitative), and be able to justify the specific approach selected to substantiate the proposed research project. Ideally there should be a link between the chosen methodology(ies) and the stated research questions (sub-problems).
- 10 **Timescale/Research Planning:** The candidate needs to be able to clearly indicate the timescales for both planning and executing the proposed research project. Here the candidate must demonstrate that the envisaged research project can be satisfactorily completed within the normal allocated period of time. In addition, the candidate must be able to demonstrate that the project is manageable as well as elucidate on each key issue that will be addressed in the research project. Here, the candidate will need to explicate the empirical phenomena or theoretical debates that underscore the proposed research as well as indicate how the intended mobility will be best utilised.
- 11 **Hypothesis(es):** The candidate should indicate the envisaged contribution that will be made to debates and discussions in the relevant subject area by providing an indication of the original / re-appropriated contribution that will be made. A statement of the hypothesis(es) is pertinent here.
- 12 **Source List:** The candidate must include a list of references to key articles and texts included in the proposal as well as those that he/she believes will become seminal reading as the research progresses.

The candidate's research proposal will be assessed in terms of both its content and form. In this regard, it should be between 4,000 – 8,000 words in length. It should be professionally presented, typed and written in grammatically correct English. The proposal must be well structured and logical, with clearly indicated section headings.