

How to write a good research proposal

Before writing a proposal, students are strongly advised to speak with a prospective supervisor in order to discuss potential topics. Once a general topic has been identified, it is necessary to do some preliminary research on the existing scholarship before beginning to write. A good proposal then goes through several drafts and re-writings. Give an advanced draft to friends, colleagues, and your prospective supervisor. Then rewrite it in light of their comments.

A good proposal should have the following basic elements, though their order and weighting can of course vary:

- 1) A working title: make this clear and descriptive.
- 2) An extended statement (c. 300 words) describing your research project.
 - What are your aims and objectives?
 - What are its parameters in space (region, country) and time (dates)? Why?
 - Why is this topic important? (TIP: It is not enough to say that nobody has researched your topic. There may be a reason why nobody has researched the role of the felt-tipped pen in transforming Ruritanian culture, for example. Explain why your topic has relevance to your region, your discipline, your methodological approach, etc. – whatever is appropriate.)
- 3) An outline of your key research questions.
 - How do you plan to research and answer them?
 - What are your sources?
 - Do you know what data exists and is accessible?
- 4) An analytic discussion of the scholarly research to date on your topic.
 - What is the current state of your field?
 - How would your research contribute to the advancement of your field?
- 5) A description of your theoretical framework and methodological approach, including an explanation of why this is best suited to your topic.
- 6) A brief statement on your particular qualifications and skills.
 - Have your previous degrees given you the necessary knowledge of the region, field, discipline, and methodologies you require?
 - What research training will you need to undertake?
 - Do you have the requisite language skills? (Please note: students are expected to be able to conduct research in the relevant languages, but the level of knowledge required varies between disciplines. If you are unsure, please consult your prospective supervisor).