

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSAL



Please note, these guidelines are not intended to be an exhaustive or overly prescriptive definition of what constitutes a successful research proposal but may be helpful to applicants who are unfamiliar with the process.

The research proposal is a vital part of the application and will be studied in detail by the academic selectors.

Your proposal must:

- be a minimum of **1,000 - 2,000 words**, and
- include an outline of your proposed research topic, and
- include an outline of your proposed research method, and
- include an outline contingency plan, and
- include a one page preliminary bibliography of the source materials you intend to use.

You may submit a more detailed proposal if you have this to hand and we recommend that applicants use their own judgement when finalising the word count.

You may wish to consult with an academic member of staff with regard to your research proposal with a member of staff before submitting your application (although this is not essential as supervisory availability is one of the issues that will be considered by our academic assessors). You should not delay submission of your application whilst contacting academic staff. If you are applying for SOAS scholarships, please be mindful that earlier deadlines may apply.

The proposal possesses a dual purpose to:

1. pinpoint your areas of interest so the Department can determine whether an appropriate supervisor can be identified, and
2. assess your ability to undertake independent research on an original and viable topic.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL TITLE

The title should give a clear idea of what your project is about. This is not a title for a book meant to catch the attention of potential readers, but just a concise and accurate description of your research project.

RESEARCH PROJECT

The following points should be developed in the proposal:

1. Your main **thesis or research question(s)**: explain in one paragraph what you will be exploring and what you will try to establish.
2. How **original** is your project and how **significant**: give your assessment of the existing literature on your topic and explain in what ways your own research will enrich the topic's scholarly knowledge. If that applies, explain what contribution to the general theoretical field you intend to bring through your specific research.
3. What **theoretical** view will inform your research: explain how you locate yourself in the theoretical fields, both the theories of your general field of enquiry and the specific field to which your topic pertains, and explain what set of conceptual tools and investigation methodologies will inform your research.
4. How you will **develop** your thesis: explain how you will apply your theoretical and methodological approach to the development of your main thesis (summarised in point 1), i.e. the main sections of the thesis that you envisage to write and the stages of your investigation:
 - the theoretical investigation (what literature you plan to survey and discuss);
 - the empirical investigation/fieldwork: where, and how, i.e. what research methodology you intend to use, and how you will use it concretely (depending on your kind of research: archival and data resources, interviews, polls, etc.)
5. Your work **schedule**: explain how you intend to research and write your thesis within the **three-year** period allocated for a full-time PhD research (six years part-time), knowing that:
 - the first year (MPhil) is a preparatory year during which you will undertake research training, take part in seminars, and focus on the literature review and the planning of the next two years. These will make the core of your upgrade (to PhD) paper;

- the second year is normally devoted to the empirical investigation / data collection, where you may conduct field research;
 - the third year is devoted to writing your thesis and completing a full draft;
 - submission of the thesis for examination must be within four years (full-time) or seven years (part-time).
6. You must explain how you will be able to achieve your plan within three years (or six years for part-time students). The two questions you'll need to answer here are:
- How feasible is your project in the assigned duration?
 - What makes you believe you can achieve it during this duration?

RESEARCH FUNDING

Please explain how you intend to fund your PhD project (including fees, living expenses, research expenses, travelling and fieldwork expenses, etc.). PhD projects can last for up to four years and it is important to have sufficient funding in place to support your studies.

If you require funding to undertake the PhD:

- clarify whether you have funding secured already, and if so, which one(s)
- if you intend to apply, state which one(s).

CONTINGENCY PLAN

Please provide an outline of an alternative or contingency plan to address any unforeseen obstacles during your studies, e.g. if intended fieldwork cannot be carried out due to unforeseen circumstances (e.g., epidemic breakouts, conflicts, difficult personal and family situations).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Attach a one-page preliminary bibliography detailing the most relevant primary and secondary sources to your specific research topic and your theoretical and methodological approach.

IMPORTANT

Please note, applicants may only submit one application to one Department each academic year. You may also only submit one proposal with your application. Once your application goes forward to the Department for consideration, the Academic Selectors may request to see a revised proposal before making a final decision. If a revised proposal is required, you will be contacted to request this.