



Applying for a PhD at Sussex

Research Proposal Guide 2016

US

UNIVERSITY
OF SUSSEX

Your research proposal

If you are **proposing your own area of research**, you need to decide on a research topic and write a research proposal as part of your application.

If you are applying for a place on a funded project at Sussex you must write a specific statement as to why you are the right person for the project.

If you are **proposing your own area of research**, see our guidance for writing a research proposal below.

Writing your research proposal

You must contact the relevant [academic department](#) before applying to Sussex and check if there are any additional requirements for your research proposal.

It is also a good idea to plan your research proposal in advance.

You should:

- set out some questions that you want your proposal to answer
- break down your research proposal into sections, so the content is easier to manage
- make detailed notes to help you when you come to writing the real thing.

What makes a strong research proposal?

A strong research proposal:

- formulates a precise, interesting research question
- establishes the relevance and value of the proposed research question in the context of current academic thinking
- describes and evaluates the data or source material your research requires
- outlines a clear and practical methodology, which enables you to answer the research question
- states clearly what you hope to discover at the end of your research and what new areas it might open up.

Contact faculty for advice

If you need further advice, contact our [academic staff](#) who are working in your field. You can also ask research students and academic staff at your current university for help. You can:

- talk about your ideas with faculty and research students, and use their suggestions to further your reading and understanding of research directions
- contact potential supervisors at Sussex and share the first draft of your research proposal. They can give you feedback and help you refine your proposal before you submit your application.

[Discover how to find a supervisor:](#)

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/study/phd/apply/tips-research-degrees/finding-supervisor>

Proofread your research proposal

It is essential that you use accurate information and correct punctuation and spelling in your research proposal. Write in clear sentences and ensure that your research proposal is structured in a logical and easy to understand format.

Ask someone else to proofread your research proposal and check it for any errors before submitting it to Sussex.

So that you are fully prepared, we have provided advice to help guide you through the writing process. To see the advice, find the subject area relevant to your research proposal below.

Business, Management and Economics

Length: 2,000 words

Your research proposal should include the following sections:

Introduction

- include a short summary of the central question behind your research
- explain the background of your proposed project
- describe the expected outcome of your project.

Thesis statement

Write a summary of your overarching research question and include:

- why your research area is of academic and practical interest
- how your research builds on existing work
- what has inspired you to pursue your area of research
- your knowledge of the research area.

Literature review

You must show you have the ability to review current research (literature and papers) within your field of study. Your literature review should demonstrate that your research question is relevant, you are aware of the work of others in your field, and how your research will contribute new findings to the subject area.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides the rationale behind your research proposal. You must provide a critical review of existing theories, which are closely related to your research topic. Show how these theories frame your research questions and the overall structure of your research proposal.

Methodology

You must show how you will carry out the research and analyse your findings. Include potential sources, how data will be collected, and any difficulties there may be in conducting your research.

Ethical considerations

Outline any ethical concerns which arise from your research topic or your proposed methods. Read the existing codes of conduct in the social sciences before writing this part of your research proposal.

Bibliography

List the sources you have used in your literature review and any potential sources you may use for your research.

Education and Social Work

Your research proposal should describe what you want to research, why it is important to the field, and how you plan to conduct your study.

Title

You must provide a working title for your research, this is likely to change over time, but provides a good starting point for your proposal.

Introduction

Write a summary of the overarching research question and include:

- why the subject is important to you
- how it is an important area of research for the field
- how your research will contribute to our knowledge and understanding.

Background

Describe the purpose of your study and your goals for your research. Explain how your proposed research relates to existing work in the field, and how it will contribute new findings to research.

Methodology

Show how you plan to carry out your research and include:

- participant observation
- analysis
- interviews
- questionnaires.

Timetable

Provide a timeline, including the time it takes to analyse your data and write your final thesis.

Bibliography

Include citations for texts you have used to support your arguments and provide a bibliography at the end of your research proposal.

Engineering and Informatics

Length: 2,000 words

You should identify which research group you want to work with and check that we can support your area of research before writing your research proposal.

Your research proposal should include:

- your interest in the particular research area and the topic you want to study
- the specific research questions you want to investigate
- your knowledge of the subject and relevant research literature you have read
- the methods and techniques you will use for your research
- explain your motivation for applying for a PhD degree and outline your career aspirations.

English

Your research proposal should include the following sections:

Title

You must provide a working title for your research, this is likely to change over time, but provides a good starting point for your proposal.

Introduction

You should introduce the questions and issues central to your research and explain how your research will benefit the field.

Research background

Expand on the information you have given in your introduction and try to answer the following questions:

- what are the key texts already existing in your field?
- how does your proposal differ from existing research?
- what will your project contribute to existing work in the field?
- how does your project expand our understanding and knowledge of the subject?

You must set out your research questions as clearly as possible and explain the problems you want to explore.

Research methods

Show how you plan to carry out your research:

- does your project involve archives, databases or specialist libraries?
- is your study interdisciplinary?
- what are the theoretical resources you intend to use and why?
- is your research based on a single author or a group of writers and texts?

Timetable

Set out your timescale for completing your study. You need to think about dividing your research into sections and indicate how you plan to write up each section.

Bibliography

Include a bibliography, which lists the books and articles, you have referred to in the proposal.

Global Studies

Length: 1,000 to 2,000 words

Your research proposal should include the following sections:

Introduction

Include a short summary of your central question. You should tell us what you are attempting to research and why it is significant.

Thesis statement and literature review

Explain the subject matter of your project, and why you think the issues raised are important. You should also show us you are familiar with texts in the field, and can show how your research area is relevant, and in context to current academic thinking.

You must explain how your proposed project is original and will increase our understanding of the subject matter. You must state clearly what you hope to discover at the end of your research.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework provides the rationale behind your research proposal. You must provide a critical review of existing theories, which are closely related to your research topic.

Show how these theories frame your research questions and the overall structure of your research proposal.

Methodology

Show how you plan to carry out your research and how you will analyse the findings.

Ethical considerations

Outline any ethical concerns which arise from either your research topic or your proposed methods of collating data.

Bibliography

List the sources you have used in your literature review and point to potential sources for your research.

History, Art History and Philosophy

Length: 2,000 words

Your research proposal should include the following sections:

Title

You must provide a working title for your research, this is likely to change over time, but provides a good starting point for your proposal.

Introduction

You should introduce the questions and issues central to your research and explain how your research will benefit the field.

Research background

Expand on the information you have given in your introduction and try to answer the following questions:

- what are the key texts already existing in your field?
- how does your proposal differ from existing research?
- what will your project contribute to existing work in the field?
- how does your project expand our understanding and knowledge of the subject?

You must set out your research questions as clearly as possible and explain the problems you want to explore.

Research methods

Show how you plan to carry out your research:

- does your project involve archives, databases or specialist libraries?
- is your study interdisciplinary?
- what are the theoretical resources you intend to use and why?
- is your research based on a single author or a group of writers and texts?

Timetable

Set out your timescale for completing your study. You need to think about dividing your research into sections and indicate how you plan to write up each section.

Bibliography

Include a bibliography, which lists the books and articles, you have referred to in the proposal.

Law, Politics and Sociology

Length: 3,000 to 4,000 words

Your research proposal should include the following sections:

Introduction

You should:

- include a short summary of the central question behind your research
- explain the background of your proposed project
- describe the expected outcome of your project.

Thesis statement

Write a summary of your overarching research question and include:

- why your research area is of academic and practical interest
- how your research builds on existing work
- what has inspired you to pursue your area of research
- your knowledge of the research area.

Literature review

You must show you have the ability to review current research (literature and papers) within your field of study. Your literature review should demonstrate that your research question is relevant, you are aware of the work of others in your field, and how your research will contribute new findings to the subject area.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides the rationale behind your research proposal. You must provide a critical review of existing theories, which are closely related to your research topic. Show how these theories frame your research questions and the overall structure of your research proposal.

Methodology

You must show how you will carry out the research and analyse your findings. Include potential sources, how data will be collected, and any difficulties there may be in conducting your research.

Ethical considerations

Outline any ethical concerns which arise from your research topic or your proposed methods. Read the existing codes of conduct in the social sciences before writing this part of your research proposal.

Bibliography

List the sources you have used in your literature review and any potential sources you may use for your research.

Life Sciences

Length: 2,000 words

You should identify which research group you want to work with and check that we can support your area of research before writing your research proposal.

Your research proposal should include:

- your interest in the particular research area and the topic you want to study
- the specific research questions you want to investigate
- your knowledge of the subject and relevant research literature you have read
- the methods and techniques you will use for your research
- explain your motivation for applying for a PhD degree and outline your career aspirations.

Mathematics and Physical Sciences

Length: 1,500 – 2,000 words

You should either:

- write a new research proposal
- write a general personal statement, which describes a broad topic of interest to you and how your areas of academic strength would benefit the topic
- write a specific personal statement, which shows us why you are the right person for one of our advertised research projects.

You should:

- explain your interest in the research area and your motivation for carrying out the research
- describe the questions you want to investigate, including references to research literature
- show which methods and techniques you will use to achieve your aims.

If you are applying for an advertised research project you should tell us:

- which project or PhD scholarship you want to be considered for in the financial information section
- if you have another way of funding your studies if we are unable to offer you a place on a funded project
- the name of your sponsor, if you will be funded by a third party.

Media, Film and Music

Length: 1,500 to 2,000 words (not including bibliography)

Your research proposal should include the following sections:

Title

You must provide a working title for your research, this is likely to change over time, but provides a good starting point for your proposal.

Brief abstract

You must write a 50 to 80 word summary of your research question.

Background

Indicate why you think your research will be an original contribution to the knowledge and understanding of the subject area, and why you think your research matters.

Identify key research questions

Present three main research questions and describe what the questions are, why they are important, and how you will answer them.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework provides the rationale behind your research proposal. You must provide a critical review of existing theories, which are closely related to your research topic.

Show how these theories frame your research questions and the overall structure of your research proposal.

Methodology

Show us how you intend to achieve your research aims and outcomes and how you will answer your research questions.

Bibliography

List the texts, videos or online resources you have used.

Psychology

Length: 1,000 to 1,500 words

Your research proposal should contain the following sections:

Introduction

- why your research topic interesting and important
- what we know already about the research area and how your study will expand our knowledge of it.

You should assume you are writing your research proposal for someone who has a good understanding of psychology, but not an expert in your area of research.

Background

You should identify any gaps in our knowledge of your research area, and your research will fill them. At the end of the section outline your aims and hypotheses.

Methodology

We are interested in your ability to think critically. You should answer the following questions:

- what kind of control conditions are needed for your research?
- what do you need to measure and how?
- do you need to run any pilot studies?
- what difficulties might you have carrying out your research, and how can these be overcome?

You are expected to show how your initial idea can be developed and expanded over the duration of your PhD degree.

Reference list

You must add in a reference list in American Psychological Association format.