

How to Write a Research Proposal

1. **Preliminary research**

Before you make your application, check that the specialist area you wish to study is covered by staff at the university. Look up staff profiles on the university's website or in the prospectus, or look for papers they have written. Check whether there is a prescribed format for the application, and if there is, follow it, even if it differs from what is set out here. Should you be submitting your proposal to more than one institution be prepared to modify it to suit each institution's requirements.

A proposal is a little like the early parts of a dissertation, but its primary aim is not to contribute to a body of academic learning, but to make a case for doing a piece of research. It will therefore be briefer and punchier. It may be between 1500 and 2000 words in length and include the following.

2. **A title**

Use a few key words that sum up the objective of the research and the proposed methodology

3. **An explanation of the research problem**

How will your research be used? For example it may resolve theoretical issues in your field, or lead to the development of new theoretical models; it may influence the ways people working in the field operate in future; or it may influence politicians and other decision makers. Think about your own background – are you particularly well-placed or qualified to do this research? Back up your arguments with details in order to build up a case for supporting the research.

4. **An explanation of the proposed research methodology**

Necessarily the form of this section will vary widely depending on the type of research being undertaken. However, typically you may wish to set out:

- A hypothesis or hypotheses that your research will test.
- A detailed explanation of your research design. If you are following an established design then you should refer to its source.
- Details of your sampling methods. Empirical research normally uses a sample to represent a population. How valid your findings are will depend on the sampling techniques used.
- A description of any particular measurement instruments or data collection procedures to be used, explaining how those instruments or procedures were developed and where they have previously been used, and with what outcome. In the same way you should give details of the techniques of data analysis you will use.

5. **Timeframes**

You need to show a realistic appreciation of the need to plan your research and of how long it is likely to take to complete it. Do not be over-optimistic when working out time frames.

6. **An explanation of how the research findings will be used**

You will have already explained why the research is important. The purpose of this final section is to give brief details of any immediate applications of your research, including any further research that may be done to build on your findings.

7. **A bibliography**

As in any piece of academic writing, you should list the articles and texts you have referred to.