



Writing a Research Proposal

The purpose of the proposal

Your research proposal is a crucial part of the information that you provide us with, and upon which we make a decision about whether to offer you a place. It tells us what topic you want to investigate, what your research questions are, and how well acquainted you are with existing work and methodology in that area. This allows us to both make a judgement on the quality of your submission and to assess whether we have appropriate supervisory capacity.

The format of the proposal

The proposal should begin by outlining the subject area that you want to investigate. It should address the key theoretical and/or empirical debates in this area.

The proposal should include a critical review of existing literature in the field. You should demonstrate a familiarity with the most important academic work relating to your chosen topic.

You should then propose the research questions that you want to address in relation to the topic. You should indicate how these are generated in relation to existing work in the field – for example, flaws and gaps in particular theories, policy implications, or problems with existing empirical data.

Having delineated your research questions, you will also need to discuss what the appropriate methods are for developing an informed response. For theoretical work this may involve a particular approach such as analytical political philosophy or discourse analysis. For more empirical work you will need to discuss what the appropriate sources of data are, how you will use the data to establish whether your arguments are correct (e.g., hypotheses to be tested), and how they can best be accessed – for example through surveys, archival work, or interviews. You will also need to consider how these data will be analysed.

You should indicate how this is 'original' research, in the sense of showing what contribution your research will make to existing scholarship in the field. You will have no findings at this stage, so you need to cast this in terms of your expectations – what are you expecting to find?

Your proposal should have the same professional appearance as a published piece of work. It should be properly referenced and include a bibliography of the sources you have cited. It should not exceed 2000 words.

As it is a proposal for future research, it is important to understand that you will not be expected to adhere rigidly to the contents of the proposal when you undertake the study. All research projects evolve and change as the researcher learns more, but it is important that this is done with the advice and agreement of your supervisors. If your project changes radically, such that the topic being researched is substantively different, the School reserves the right to reassess whether it has the capacity to supervise the new project.