

Guidelines on the Preparation of the Research Proposal

This is a guideline document to assist candidates on the content of Research Proposals. Research Proposals should include the following components:

- i. **Introduction**

The introduction provides the reader with sufficient information on the field of study to allow for an appreciation of the proposed research i.e. it places the project in context with what is known. This section can also form the basis for the introduction of the dissertation/thesis.
- ii. **Aim**

A clear statement of the general aims of the project plus a set of objectives that are potentially achievable.
- iii. **Hypotheses and Questions**

A hypothesis is a tentative theory about the natural world that can be tested by further investigation, whilst the questions allow for more specific/focussed attention to particular aspects of the project. It is essential that the hypotheses and/or questions are clearly and unambiguously stated. Since it is these statements that are going to guide the research through the practical portion of the project and will also assume central roles in the written dissertation/thesis it is important to consider their wording and composition very carefully. Many candidates find this a difficult task.
- iv. **Methodology**

This section varies with each discipline. In essence the section provides a detailed description of what material is to be used, what experimentation is to be conducted, what data are to be collected and how the data are to be analysed. It is worth spending time on this section as it will give you a clear indication of what work you will be conducting and assists you in planning the project. Consideration must also be given to the following: whether the material is readily available; whether permission is required to gain access to the material; whether ethics clearance is required. Solutions to potential problems must also be considered.
- v. **Work plan**

This plan details what work is to be done and when. It is essential that when this plan is prepared, you are realistic about what can be achieved in any given time. You will find that you often underestimate how long it will take to achieve a particular task, check your timings with your supervisor or other senior postgraduates in your field.

As is common in industry and the broader work place, many supervisors also ask for a budget to be prepared for the project. The sources of funding must also be indicated.

A proposal document is considered by the School's Postgraduate Committee or readers. Adjustments and corrections to the document may be recommended by the committee or by the readers. Once the project proposal has been accepted by the committee, the document is signed by the candidate, supervisor(s) and postgraduate co-ordinator/ Head of School. The signed document is submitted to the Faculty Office for consideration by the Graduate Studies Committee and represents a formal acknowledgement by the candidate to undertake the research under the guidance of the supervisor(s).

The proposal document must be submitted to the Faculty Office within a specified period of the original registration, or the School may cancel the registration of the candidate. (Full-time masters' candidates must submit within four months, part-time masters candidates must submit within eight months. Full-time doctoral candidates must submit within six months and part-time doctoral candidates must submit within twelve months.)