

# Writing a Humanities PhD Proposal

## School of Humanities

### What is a PhD?

- A PhD provides you with the opportunity to produce an extended piece of research and critical writing.
- The research you undertake gives you the opportunity to contribute new research to a discipline area.
- An 'original contribution to knowledge' is an essential part of a PhD – although this isn't as daunting as it might seem at first.
- You can review completed PhDs via a keyword search at <https://ethos.bl.uk/Home.do>

### Structuring your proposal:

Your proposal should be no more than 1500 words plus a bibliography.

You should use your existing knowledge of writing research proposals (for your MA dissertation for example) for the development of your PhD proposal. However, one thing that is distinct about a PhD proposal is that you are seeking to identify the questions that are central to your study – the answers will come when you undertake the research.

- Title: This should be clear and indicative – you can revise your title later.
- Research Question: This is often the most challenging part of the process see the notes below. This is where you would identify the 'original contribution to knowledge'. This is often the trickiest section to get right at proposal stage and it is often the part of the research process that will change as you develop your proposal. What 'intervention' is this proposal making in my field of study? What new knowledge about form and/or practice does it aim to produce?
- Methodology: What work already exists in this field? You need material to be available for you to build on and develop. What forms of research do you intend to undertake (library-based study, field research, ethnographic studies, etc) and why are these important to your research process? Make sure these are directly relevant – make sure you connect the method of research directly to the question you want to answer.
- Schedule: Can you give a very brief overview of key moment in the development of your PhD?
- Ethics: Are there any issues relating to research ethics that will need to be addressed? This will often relate to whether you are using methods such as interviews, questionnaires, etc.
- Biographical note: You may wish to indicate what work you have already undertaken that you will bring to the study. This should be connected directly to research methods and topic.
- Indicative bibliography: It is important that there is material available about your subject. It is also important that you are familiar with the core texts that you propose to use. You don't have to have read everything you indicate on your bibliography in detail; it is a scoping exercise to identify core texts. Keep the bibliography specific and as current as possible. Identify creative and critical sources that you will investigate.

When you have drafted the above you should approach prospective supervisors or the School of Humanities Postgraduate Research Lead to comment on and help develop your proposal. Please take a look at the staff directory and enquire with the member/s of staff that have expertise in your research area. This can be an informal enquiry initially.

<https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/schools/school-of-humanities/staff-directory/>

It helps to enquire with at least a draft proposal. Then when you make a formal application via admissions you will need a completed proposal. Information on what is expected, and some examples can be found here. Of course proposals will vary somewhat depending on the subject discipline:

<https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/research/apply/examples-of-research-proposals/>

Initial proposals are often too broad and the more specific you can make it the better it will be. This is where a prospective supervisor will be able to advise.

Don't worry about the proposal being in draft form – it is useful to share work in progress and in development.

If your proposal is successful, you will be invited to interview where you will be able to give a presentation to expand on your ideas. Treat your proposal as a focussed summary of the ideas.

### **Application Process:**

Details of the application and entry requirements are available here -

<https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate/research-degrees/doctor-of-philosophy-phd/>

Information about the postgraduate student academic journey is available here –

<https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/quality-gateway/research-degrees/the-york-st-john-student-research-lifecycle/>

### **Additional Resources:**

Find a PhD - <https://www.findaphd.com/guides/writing-phd-research-proposal>

Indeed - <https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/how-to-write-phd-proposal>

PhD Assistance - <https://www.phdassistance.com/blog/how-to-write-your-research-proposal/>

Prospects UK - <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/postgraduate-study/phd-study/how-to-write-a-successful-research-proposal>

Vitae - <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/doing-research/doing-a-doctorate/starting-a-doctorate/writing-a-research-proposal>