

Guidelines for PhD provisional year full thesis proposal

A doctoral degree is intellectually demanding, time-consuming, and sometimes a little threatening in that there are risks associated with developing and seeing the project through to completion, and gaining final acceptance. However, experience has shown that many of these risks can be substantially reduced by the development of a full research proposal. A proposal is not a "good idea for research" but should provide details of why the idea is a good one (how it fits with previous research, how it will contribute to knowledge) and how you will explore your good idea (your research approach and the kinds of analysis you will use).

The transition from an idea for a thesis to a well-defined proposal is frequently the most difficult task of the research project. This may take several months or more. Thus the intention of the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences is that the student and supervisor create a preliminary thesis proposal prior to PhD enrolment and then this document is matured into a full thesis proposal over the first nine months of study. To this end the Faculty has produced a template for the preliminary thesis proposal which can then be developed into a full thesis proposal, allowing reviewers to easily see how the project ideas hypotheses and methodologies hve mature during the provisional year of registration.

Out of necessity, all PhD research topics must be related to one or more specialist areas of literature and methodologies. However, since the proposal must receive approval from the Faculty it should contain enough detail to be understood by members of staff whose expertise may not be in the literature(s) and methodology(ies) you have selected.

It is also important to note that a full research proposal is a University requirement and is a mandatory output of the provisional year. Within the Faculty, this proposal is due nine months after the date of registration. After the proposal is submitted it will be reviewed and assessed by the Departmental Postgraduate committee as part of the Provisional year review process. Doctoral students and supervisors will be notified by the School of Graduate Studies that the provisional year review, which includes the development of the full thesis proposal, is to be completed by a specified date.

The full research proposal should be prepared on the Faculty template using the preliminary thesis proposal that you prepared prior to enrolment as a starting point. The key elements of the template are:

Title: A sentence that accurately encapsulates your research topic

Introduction: briefly describe the research background to your proposed are of study

Hypothesis/Research Question: State what the research project will deal with. If hypotheses are appropriate they should be stated, along with the rationale, if the problem is not one in which a hypothesis is appropriate, then the problem or question should be clearly stated and amplified.

Objectives: The overall objective should describe how you intend to address the question posed above. This is usually broken down further into specific objectives which describe the detailed actions or sub-studies required to reach the overall objective

Methods: describe how you intend to answer your question and be as explicit as possible. The notion of methodology incorporates a wide range of possible approaches to the collection and analysis of information, from the experimental method in psychological research to the development of an argument of the analysis of concepts in philosophical research. The choice of method should be justified in terms of the question being asked.

Where possible particular techniques of data collection and analysis should be described as explicitly as possible. Such description does not preclude later changes in method, but it is desirable that you demonstrate at this early stage that you have given considerable thought to the practicalities of the conduct of your research.

Outcomes: A requirement of a PhD thesis is that it make an original contribution to knowledge. Thus, you need to show how the proposed research is sufficiently important to justify your efforts (and the efforts of those you involve in your research). This should include a statement of how the solution to the problem, or answer to the question, can influence educational theory or practice.

Access and Resources: should identify any special requirements for your project and any possible roadblocks to timely completion of you PhD.

Provisional Goals: should be marked as achieved or not. If not achieved, explain why not any any adjustments to the project that are necessitated by this.

The proposal is a plan for the student to follow. But it also provides the supervisor and subsequently the staff of the Faculty, with the information on which they can approve and/or suggest modifications to the research project. If the proposal is highly explicit, approval of the research project by the Faculty implies that, providing the research is properly conducted and clearly documented, there is a high probability of the final thesis being accepted.

Looking backwards: In developing a proposal it is useful to remind yourself of what the examiners will be looking for in the final thesis when you have completed it. In a good thesis the following elements can be traced back to the proposal.

- a distinct contribution to knowledge
- evidence of the discovery of new knowledge or the exercise of independent judgement
- literary presentation
- original work of merit worth of publication
- evidence of competence in independent research
- understanding of concepts, issues, techniques and methodology
- critical use of published work and source materials.