

Guidelines on Writing a Research Proposal: School of Modern Languages

The quality of your research proposal will largely determine your success or failure when applying to complete postgraduate research (PhD or MPhil) in the School of Modern Languages. Hence it is important that you devote a few days of your time to clarifying your research questions in a clear manner. You should situate your proposal in the relevant literature, specify and justify your methodology and offer a broad tentative outline of the structure of the research. You should also ensure that the proposal is clear and concise. Take time to edit the proposal carefully and get a friend to read it and offer critical feedback before you submit it.

This document aims to help you in writing a high quality proposal and to show you the criteria that we use in our internal assessment. Remember that the research proposal forms a central element in providing us with evidence of your commitment and motivation to undertake research study and your potential to make a good research student. The proposal should demonstrate that you have put time and energy into thinking about your proposed research.

Regard writing the proposal as the first part of your research training. It should show us that you have undertaken some preliminary research in your area. At the same time remember that the proposal is just the first stage and will be refined and changed once the research begins.

What you should try to demonstrate

1. That there is a good fit between your proposal and existing expertise to supervise your topic within the School of Modern Languages (consult the website for staff interests before you write the proposal www.cardiff.ac.uk/modern-languages)
2. That you have a good familiarity with the broad body of literature in your proposed field of study (include references). Appending an initial bibliography of expected key sources is a good way to do this
3. That you have attempted to clarify your initial research question so that the proposal is focused and has a clear purpose and direction.
4. That you are clear about the methodological approach that you hope will enable you to best address this research question, and are clear about why you adopt this approach
5. That you are capable of independent critical thinking and analysis so that the internal assessors are excited by the prospect of working with you.
6. That you think and write clearly, concisely and coherently so that internal assessors do not have to keep re-reading the proposal in the hope of understanding it.

How to write the proposal

1. Clarify the working title

2. Establish your key research objectives in terms of basic research questions, hypotheses, or propositions as relevant to your field of study. Why does it excite you? What value might it add to the subject? Is it achievable given the timescale and resources available to you?
3. Situate it in the wider field of study. Does it contest existing work? How does it relate to expertise within the School?
4. Examine the research methods that you will use, and explain why. Are they innovative?
5. Provide a general indication of the proposed stages of the research, the timetable involved, and any possible difficulties that might arise and how you might overcome them.
6. List key references according to the Harvard conventions at the end and refer to them in the proposal.

Aim to write a proposal that is 2,000-3,000 words in length

Remember that it is a general outline and should demonstrate your ability to write concisely and coherently. There is no necessary advantage in greater length. However, a proposal of just 2-3 paragraphs will not be sufficient.

2014/15