

Brighton Doctoral College

A proposal should include the following:

1. Indicative title of the topic area

This should accurately reflect what it is that you want to study and the central issues that you are going to address.

2. Context / rationale / why is this study important? (300 – 500 words)

Introduce the general area of study and identify the theoretical context within which your research will be developed by discussing the discipline(s) and or field/s of study relevant to your research. This means outlining the key theoretical area(s) you will draw upon to enable you to find out what it is that you want to know (e.g. underpinned from the social sciences; arts and humanities; life, health and physical sciences). In addition, you will need to contextualise your research in terms of the literature of your subject area. What we are looking for here is an indication that you understand and have done some research into the wider theoretical context.

Developing the context is just one part of this section; you are building a case / rationale for the study area. Why is this study important, which theoretical areas support this? Can you identify any gaps in current understanding that help you build the case for this research study?

In this section you could outline the main aim of the study (also see section 4).

3. Literature review (approximately 700 – 900 words)

Here are demonstrating that you are aware of what has been and what is currently being written about your topic (i.e. the academic literature, Government documents, media coverage). We are looking for you to make links between a body of literature and your proposed area of study and in so attempt to identify any gaps in knowledge. A PhD thesis arises from original research leading to new knowledge or a significant contribution to existing knowledge. If, at this stage, you have some thoughts on how your research is likely to contribute to knowledge then include details in your proposal. This section should include citations which are compiled into a reference list at the end of the document (see point 7).

4. The research questions or hypotheses (approximately 200 words)

Having told us what you want to study and why, and then illustrated these ideas with reference to a body of literature, the next task is to distil your ideas into a tentative set of research questions, hypotheses, aims and objectives (as per the underpinning discipline requires) that are manageable and achievable within a normal PhD timeframe (see 6 below).

5. Research approach/ methodologies / methods (approximately 400 words)

There will be many research approaches open to you. In your proposal, suggest the methodological approach that you might take and make a reasoned case as to why the research questions you have

posed are best addressed by this approach. You might also suggest what methods you would use to generate data that can help you address your research questions.

6. Timescale/research planning (approximately 200 words)

A full time PhD should take three years to complete, although you may require more time to acquire the relevant skills prior to commencing your research. Part time study will take longer (up to five - six years). Within this timeframe, you will need to demonstrate your awareness of time management and planning (e.g. length of time for primary research/ fieldwork).

7. Reference List (at least 10 – 20 references)

Please include a reference list of all the sources that you referred to in the text using a recognised referencing style appropriate to your discipline (e.g. Harvard or Vancouver for Sciences).

There a number of books widely available that may help in preparing your research proposal (as well as in completing your research degree), here are a few to point you in the right direction:

Bell, J (2010, 5th edn) *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-time Researchers in Education & Social Science*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Baxter, L, Hughes, C and Tight, M (2007, 3rd edn) *How to Research*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Philips, E and Pugh, D (2005, 4th edn) *How to get a PhD: A Handbook for Students and their Supervisors*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.