



PhD research at the School of Education UCD: a guide to writing your thesis proposal

The on-line application requires you to complete a research proposal, indicating the area you would hope to work on in your PhD thesis. This document contains some guidelines on how to write the research proposal.

Title: Suggest a working title for your PhD topic (this may well change during the thesis research)

Overall Aim/Research Question (250 - 300 words)

Provide an outline of the topic for investigation, including commentary on why the research is needed, and what it will contribute to knowledge.

Review of the Literature (500-1000 words)

Write a summary account of existing academic writing on your subject. This will help you to formulate your research problems. It may also suggest research methodologies appropriate to the thesis. If relevant, organise the literature review into national and international research, and indicate how the proposed thesis research fits into current debates.

Research Methodology (500 - 1000 words)

Researchers use a variety of methodologies in their research. Indicate, if possible, the method/s that you expect to use, and comment on the feasibility of your proposed project. Include some indication of sample size and selection where relevant; if the thesis relies on unpublished primary sources (such as archival records) indicate whether you have already secured access to these sources. Although it is accepted that the research design may change as the thesis develops, it is important to give as clear an outline of the design as possible. Consider, for example, some of the following points when writing this section of the proposal:

1. Will the research will be conceptual, qualitative or quantitative or will combine a mixed methods approach. Will the thesis include, for example, action research, philosophical/conceptual research, survey research, historical/archival research, case studies, ethnographic research etc.
2. Strengths and limitations of research design
3. If quantitative research is envisaged proposals should include some ideas around sampling/population to be studied, statistical tests and measures including relevance and validity

Proposals should adhere to ethical guidelines regarding research with human subjects (see www.ucd.ie/research/ethics)

but guidance around seeking ethical approval will be provided during the course of the structured PhD programme. Prospective students may find it useful to consult the research ethics sections of research methods textbooks such as Chapter Three in "Ethics, Legal Constraints and Human Relations" in W.R. Borg and M.D. Gall, *Educational Research: an Introduction*.

Analysis (300 – 600 words)

The analysis section should include an outline of the anticipated conceptual, statistical or other analysis to be used in the research, as appropriate. Reference should be made to the potential implications of the research for education.

Summary Outline of Chapters (300 words)

The proposal should include a preliminary outline of the thesis under a series of broad chapter headings (table of contents). These will inevitably change as the research develops but at this stage it helps to provide an overall structure to the research proposal.

Preliminary Bibliography (300 words)

Please include a short bibliography, including journal articles and books. The titles included should reflect some of the most recently published scholarly research in the field.

Word Count

The PhD thesis proposal should be between 2500–3500 words and should be written with the following headings in mind:

Recommended Reading

Arthur, James and Andrew Peterson (2012), *The Routledge Companion to Education*. Oxon., Routledge.

Cohen, L. (2007) *Research Methods in Education*, London, Routledge (6th edition).

Dunleavy, P. (2003) *Authoring a PhD*. Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan.

Gall, M; Gall; J; Borg, W (2006) *Educational Research*, London, Allyn and Bacon (8th edition).

Goodson, I. and P. Sikes (2001) *Life History Research in Educational Settings*. Milton Keynes, OUP.

Gorard, S. (2004) *Combining Methods in Educational and Social Research*. Milton Keynes, Open University Press.

Teddlie, C and Tashakori, A. (2009) *Foundations of mixed methods research: integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioural sciences*. London, Sage.

Silverman, D (2010) *Doing Qualitative Research: a Practical Handbook*. London, Sage (3rd edition).
