

Guidelines for Major Research Paper and Thesis Proposals

Research proposals (for major research papers and theses) for The School of International Development & Global Studies (SIDGS) should include:

1. A brief introduction to your research topic, your key research questions, and the significance of your proposed research.
2. A literature review – ending with your preliminary conceptual framework.
3. An explanation of your research design and specific research methods.
4. An ethics statement (particularly for thesis proposals, or in cases where ethics is required).
5. A time-line.
6. A selected bibliography.

Proposals should be between **3,000-4,000 words**, including a selected bibliography (minimum 15 sources). Thesis proposals often grow into larger documents, but we strongly encourage you not to exceed **5,000 words for your full proposal**.

Details, section by section

Introduction

A brief introduction should address four main points:

- a. **Introduce the problem(s) you plan to address.** Briefly introduce the relevant literature here in a punchy and compelling manner, clarify why there is a gap or problem, a lack of understanding, fuzzy thinking about an issue, etc. What are the main theoretical debates and explanations related to your issue? Is there reason to question some of the assumptions underlying current approaches? Is there a lack of evidence regarding your issue? To do this, you must demonstrate that you have a good grasp of the current state of understanding, i.e. what research has been done, how, what is known and what is not known yet.
- b. **Introduce your proposed research questions.** Avoid questions to which the answers have already been established in the relevant literatures.
- c. **Briefly preview how *your* research will enable you to explore this problem**, i.e. how you will conduct original research to answer your questions. If you are using a deductive approach and plan to formally test hypotheses, note your preliminary hypotheses here. Even if you are not planning to formally test hypotheses, note your hunches. You should also include two or three sentences previewing your preliminary analytical or theoretical framework in this section.
- d. **Briefly explain the practical and/or theoretical significance of your proposed research.** As a general rule, aim to explore a subject in a way that will shed new light on development and/or globalization issues that you have discerned in the literature and/or through experience. This can be done by applying an established

theoretical perspective to a new case or body of data, by exploring a new theoretical perspective in relation to relevant data, by using established research methods to explore a new case or broader data, etc. Take advantage of the fact that our interdisciplinary program encourages you to (selectively) use a variety of disciplinary and theoretical lenses to understand issues.

Literature review

The literature review builds on your introduction by **systematically situating the proposed research in the context of the relevant scholarly and policy literatures**. As a result, you must provide the background for understanding why your proposed topic constitutes a “problem”. You need to show that you understand what has already been demonstrated and that you are not reinventing the wheel. Use appropriate subheadings to identify major topics you are covering. At the end of the literature review, the reader should have a clear understanding of what is known, what requires better understanding, and why your proposed research is important.

At the end of this section, you should elaborate on the analytical (and if possible theoretical) framework that you are thinking of using to orient your research. This should flow from your analysis of the literature and into your explanation of research methods. Ensure that you cover a critical mass of relevant, peer-reviewed sources in your review. If relevant, also demonstrate that you are trying to access and incorporate less conventional sources such as grey literature from the South, “voices of the poor”, etc. For guidance please review Meth & Williams’ chapter in the Desai and Potter (2006) reader (found online as an e-book at the U Ottawa Library) on what are “relevant literatures” -- theoretical, comparative, policy, case-specific and methodological.

Research design and methodology

In this section you should describe the overall design and specific methods you will employ in your research and to analysis relevant data. Your research design and methodologies must clearly link to your stated problematic and research objectives, the hypotheses you want to test formally or the hunches you want to explore more informally/inductively. In particular, if you are using quantitative methods, clarify your hypotheses, your key variables and how you will measure the relationships between them.

It is important to detail what you will look at and the different sets of data you will gather (e.g. archival records, policy documents, interviews, survey data, etc). State how this data will help you understand the aspects of your research problem. Explain how you will proceed with each step, including sampling if relevant. If you will be conducting a literature review of documents, state the types of documents you will consult, how you will find and select them, etc. If you plan to use special methods for your analysis, such as transcription and translation of texts, content analyses, or specific analyses for your survey results, state those methods.

Next, you must justify your choice of methods. Whatever your data collection methods, you need to show that you have thought about the reliability and validity of your questions. You should also show that you are being realistic about what you can accomplish. Please review Mayoux's chapter in the Desai and Potter (2006) reader, for guidance on criteria for selecting appropriate research methods. Also draw on more specialized chapters in the Desai and Potter (2006) texts, regarding HOW to design and conduct particular quantitative, qualitative and participatory methods.

Lastly, address any special research needs you may have, e.g. equipment such as audio recorders, video cameras, special computer programs for data analysis (NVivo, Excel or SPSS). Will you need to speak another language? Will you need to take further language or research methodology courses? Will you require translation?

Ethics statement

Questions to consider include:

- Are there ethical concerns in your research that you need to address? Will you be using human subjects? If so, your research could put them (or you) at risk and you need to spell out how will you manage those risks. If you are conducting any interviews with people (online interviews, face to face interviews, Skype interviews), you will require ethical clearance from the University.

If you will be completing a thesis this section should be a stepping stone towards your ethics application, which you will be required to complete and submit to the UO Research Ethics Board (REB). Please outline when you will seek ethical clearance and familiarize yourself with what is required (<https://research.uottawa.ca/ethics/>).

Time-line

For any study, desk-based or field-based, a time-line (or calendar) is used to generate a timetable indicating the stages of your research and the amount of time you plan to allocate to each.

Bibliography (at least 15 sources)

This section should include complete bibliographic references for ALL sources cited in your proposal. Consult your advisor as to preferred citation and referencing style (e.g. APA, AAA, ASA, Chicago, etc.). Whichever format you use, *be consistent and ensure you include all necessary data.*

Stylistic & editorial guidelines

Write your proposal in clear language and in a concise manner. Avoid jargon. Proposals are used to obtain funding and are often read by people from varied disciplinary backgrounds. Demonstrate to your readers that you have thought carefully about your research but that you respect their expertise too.

PROOFREAD and revise your text as many times as needed. If you are writing in your second or third language, have the text reviewed by a competent peer before submitting the final version.

Proposals should be written in 12 point font, preferably Times New Roman. Proposals can be single or 1.5 spaced. If handing in a paper proposal to your Supervisor, please consider printing it double-sided.