Crafting a convincible and achievable PhD research proposal

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What is a PhD Research Proposal

- A research proposal is a short document written to inform others about the proposed area of the research.
- This is the document that determines the potential significance and viability of your project for a PhD and whether you, the candidate have the capacity to undertake the study.
- It is advisable to write your research proposal with the guidance of your supervisor. That way you will be made aware of any particular requirements in your field of study.
### Before you start writing the proposal, ask yourself

- **What is the main research question you want to ask that has not been answered before?** – emphasizes originality, non-obviousness and novelty
- **Is the research question worth answering?** “meaning will it contributed to knowledge (and assist in developing a MRT) as well as contribute to practice”. Your developed theory must be sufficiently compelling with some powers in influencing people’s priors.
- **Will this make an interesting new and worthwhile project?** – push further in enriching prior literature
- **Will the findings be of interest to others?**
- **Can I justify undertaking this study?**
The Purpose of a research proposal

- To propose a research project that is worthwhile and will result in a significant contribution to knowledge
- To formulate a detailed plan of the project including theoretical framework and methodological approach
- To ensure that the proposed research is achievable within the required time and with the available resources
- To demonstrate that you have adequate expertise and experience to undertake the project.
A suggested format for an effective research proposal

- Present the context for the proposed research by outlining the background field and by reviewing some of the existing research.
- Establish the need for further research and in particular for the project that you are proposing.
- Presents the **Problem statement & the Research Questions** that the proposed study will investigate and answer.
- State the **Hypotheses to be tested** via theoretical elaboration if necessary in this case
Make sure that your research idea, question or problem is clearly stated, persuasive and addresses a demonstrable gap in the existing literature.

Clearly state aims of the research project.

What will you achieve in this research project? Identify the value, significance and contribution of the proposed work.

The findings will need to extend knowledge in the field - consider some possible implications of the findings.

What type of theoretical contribution is the research going to make and how and why?
Literature Review & Theoretical framework

- Review relevant previous studies. This will be a brief overview, not a comprehensive review of the literature like the one that you will present in your thesis.
- It will serve to provide a context within which your research will be situated, and whereby you can demonstrate the need for your particular research.
- Describe the theoretical framework you have chosen to use in your project and why did you choose it.
- More importantly, particularize the theoretical framework into your context
Significance/Contribution to the Discipline

- Justify the project from a review of literature on the topic:
  - discuss the texts which you believe are most important to the project,
  - demonstrate your understanding of the research issues,
  - identify existing gaps in the literature that the research is intended to address.
- This section is intended to ‘sign-post’ and contextualize your research questions and to provide a detailed analysis of existing debates.
- You should also use this section to make links between your research and the existing strengths of the discipline/faculty that will act as your advisor.
Outline and justify the proposed methodology.

You may not have the full details of the methods you will use to answer your research questions but you need to demonstrate that you have already given some thought about how you will do things.

The important thing is to anticipate the methods you will use to achieve the project aims and to show that your project is feasible in the time period available.
Methodology

- Discuss the rationale for your selection of:
  - the research paradigm and how it informs your methods and theory selection,
  - research design, i.e., case study, simulation/modelling, DSR, survey, ethnography, critical discourse analysis, action research, phenomenology, etc.,
  - research techniques/methods
  - materials, equipment, testing procedures
  - data collection techniques and the proposed data analyses.
Methodology

- Ensure that the proposal demonstrates an understanding of research methods and research approaches
- and is it clear that the research methods identified are appropriate to the research question(s) identified.
Research Plan

- Provide a careful plan of the proposed research to demonstrate that:
  - the project is feasible, can be completed within the required time
  - will provide useful evidence to achieve the research aims.
Stages in the Research

- Provide a detailed explanation of the stages in the research and the major tasks to be undertaken within each stage of your work.
- Show that you have considered the best methods to achieve the aims.
Scope and Problems

- Identify the scope of the proposed research and an appreciation of possible problems that may occur along the way.
- Discuss how you will most probably tackle the issues.
Resources Required

- Identify the resources needed to conduct the research and their availability.
  - How do you anticipate you will achieve the project and what is your rationale for adopting this approach?
  - What do you need (identify any special equipment, software or material)
  - Can you access necessary data or expertise for analyzing data?
  - Do you require particular resources?
  - Are there barriers or pitfalls?
  - Does the proposed project involve human ethics, animal ethics or safety implications?
  - Will travel or fieldwork be required? If so: where to, how long and at what intervals?
Time Lines & References

- **Time Lines**
  Use a Gantt chart to establish that the research can be completed as scheduled and in time. Provide a monthly/quarterly outline of how you will complete the work within the time scheduled.

- **References**
  Provide a list of all references that you have cited in the proposal, be consistent with one referencing style.
  - Your references should provide the reader with a good sense of your grasp on the literature and how you can contribute to it.
  - Be sure to reference texts and resources that you think will play a large role in your analysis, in addition to your planned readings.
Is the research proposal ‘set in stone’?

- No. Good PhD proposals evolve as the work progresses.
- It is normal for students to refine their original proposal in light of detailed literature reviews and theories, further consideration of research approaches and comments received from the supervisors (and other academic staff).
- It is useful to view your proposal as an initial outline rather than a summary of the ‘final product’.
- However, foresee the closure of the proposal as soon as possible to avoid it suffering from "paralysis by analysis"
Communication competency

- Make sure that your passion for the subject matter shines through in the structure and arguments presented within your proposal.
- Remember that we may not be experts in your field – it is up to you to make your project and subject matter engaging to your readers!
- Avoid technical jargons, emotion leaden proses and throwing of words anyhow, it will surely diminish your chances of acceptance of the proposal.
Abstract

The abstract is a brief summary of your Ph.D. Research proposal, and should be no longer than 200 words.

- It starts by describing in a few words the knowledge domain where your research takes place and the key issues of that domain that offer opportunities for the researchable phenomenon you intend to explore. Taking those key issues as a background, you then present briefly your problem statement, your theory and proposed research approach, the results you expect to achieve, and the anticipated implications of such results on the advancement of the knowledge domain.
Go for it !!

- Remember, your research proposal is an important preliminary work which will form a framework for your final project.

- Moreover, it is the document that may determine your acceptance into or continuation in the doctoral program.

- Therefore, take it serious !
The END
Big Thanks and Stay tuned

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS/CONTRIBUTIONS