

School of History student guidelines for PhD proposal

This document is a guide for prospective PhD students on the mechanics of a PhD proposal. It is expected that the prospective candidates will work with their supervisor(s) to develop their proposal. The proposal will then be assessed by the School's Graduate Studies Committee.

A PhD proposal consists of five different interrelated parts – an introduction (200-300 words) that lays out the context of the study and some of the broad historical and intellectual questions guiding it; a literature review (500-1000 words) that details the existing state of historiography; a detailed section on the rationale, methodology, and contribution of the proposed study (500-1000 words); a discussion of the proposed supervisor's expertise in relation to one's project (no word limit); and, finally, an itemised bibliography of primary and secondary sources (no word limit).

PROPOSED TITLE

Prospective students should offer a title for their proposed PhD that gives their audience a sense of the project's subject matter and scope.

INTRODUCTION (200-300 words)

Students should think of the introduction as an opportunity to communicate to the reader what drew them to the proposed topic of study. Rather than thinking of this in autobiographical terms ('I became interested in "x" because...'), the applicant should consider what makes this topic interesting to study and what relevance it may have for analogous topics, subjects, or disciplines. It should orient the reader to the historical context of the proposed study, and give the reader a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the project.

LITERATURE REVIEW/HISTORIOGRAPHY (500-1000 words)

The purpose of the literature review, or historiography section, is two-fold.

First, it demonstrates the student's command of the key existing material on the proposed topic. A well-developed historiography section gives the proposal credibility as it serves as one means by which the student demonstrates their authority on the questions at hand. It also is an acknowledgement of how other historians have attempted to address similar questions and the methods by which they have done so.

Second, the literature review section illuminates for the reader the 'gaps' in the existing historical edifice that need filling. Thus, a well-conceived historiography section will help convince the reader of the need for the proposed project and a sense of the candidate's knowledge and capability to do so.

RATIONALE AND METHODOLOGY (500-1000 words)

The purpose of this section is to clearly lay out the proposed project, its main research questions, the methods or theories the student intends to employ, and an outline of its potential structure. The student should *not* consider this a fixed blueprint by which they now must write their dissertation; rather, critically assessing the main questions the study will explore, methodology, and the structure by which it may do so will help launch the student confidently into a project that most likely will change over time. This section most likely will refer to authors, questions, methods, or theories outlined in the historiography section. This section should also discuss the archives and other primary source materials that the project intends to utilise.

If your research requires you to develop or acquire specific skills (languages, palaeography, etc), you should address them here and the steps you propose to develop these skills.

SUPERVISORY ARRANGEMENTS

This section should address the reasons why the applicant has chosen to apply to UCC for the PhD and discuss the ways their proposed supervisor's expertise will support the topic in question.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The bibliography section should list potential sources by type, and when deemed necessary, a brief annotation about what they may contain or their accessibility. Archival sources should come first, followed by relevant printed primary source, concluding with secondary works of significance to the project (many of which should be discussed in the historiography section of the proposal).

Common Pitfalls of a PhD proposal

Proposals may be returned for revision, or declined, for some of these reasons:

- The project is ill-defined
- The project is too large in scope
- There is not enough engagement with the existing historiography, which suggests the proposal does not have a clear sense of the field or its ability to contribute to it.

Further guidance, and the online PhD application link, are available at [UCC Apply](#).

History Graduate Studies Committee
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