

## Guidelines on the content of a PhD applicant's research proposal

The main sections of this proposal would normally consist of the following:

- a) Rationale for the research: why is this important to you and to the field? (A general statement of a problem or issue which has arisen in your professional work and/or in your reading of academic research.) This will lead into a more detailed statement under heading b).
- b) The Literature: main fields of reading which you have consulted and some major works within each. (Obviously, not a full bibliography or review, but a brief outline of the main conceptual areas, and the main representatives of particular theoretical positions and lines of research within each which are relevant to your study.) You need to establish clearly how your proposed study fits into the particular domain under review, and how it is designed to fill gaps in our knowledge and/or improve on previous work.
- c) Research question(s) to be answered: these can be stated in fairly general terms in the proposal. However, they should not be TOO general! A question such as 'How can we improve second language learners' reading comprehension skills?' would be too imprecise. A question such as: 'Do learners who have received intensive instruction in skimming and scanning skills outperform learners who have not received this instruction in assessments of these skills?' would be better. A question such as the latter would be linked to controversies and gaps in previous research, and possibly to your own experience. (See a) above.)
- d) Design of the study: again, this information can be stated in fairly general terms.
  - Data source(s): eg human subjects / texts / corpora / primary and secondary research reports etc.
  - Methods/Procedures: how the data will be selected and gathered. (eg, questionnaires, interviews, observations, tests, authentic/semi-authentic/structured language samples)
  - Methods of analysis: how the data will be organised / coded / tallied etc and, where relevant, how, in broad terms, it might be subjected to statistical analysis.
  - Feasibility: access to data/assistance. Indications of how practicable the research will be.
- e) Significance of results: general indications of what the outcome of the research might be, and how the results might affect theory and practice in the field.

The proposal should be at least 1000 words in length, though, if you have been able to do a fair amount of reading and detailed planning, it could be up to 2000 words in length (but not more).

*Revised 10/01/2013*