



DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL Writing a Research Proposal for Doctoral Applications

As part of your application to any of the doctoral programmes at DCU Business School, you are asked to complete a research proposal. In this proposal, you describe the research you plan to undertake. As such, it is a vital part of your application process.

The research proposal involves a considerable amount of preparation. You will be expected to have refined your initial research ideas through critical analysis of some of the academic literature relevant to your topic. You will also be expected to have reflected on the nature of your proposed research and its impact. In this document, we present a set of guidelines to show you what is involved in the writing of a research proposal and to help you structure your research proposal effectively.

What should the research proposal consist of?

In essence, your research proposal should answer three questions: what do you want to investigate, why do you want to investigate it, and, how are you going to investigate it? Your aim is to show us that you have begun the process of refining your ideas for a research topic. One of the ways to demonstrate this is to show how your research idea relates to published research. You need also to show that you have given some thought as to why your research ideas are worth researching. For PhD applicants, you should focus particularly on how your research will impact on academic knowledge in your chosen topic. For applicants to the Professional Doctoral Programme, you should focus particularly on how your research will generate improvements in professional practice.

How should the research proposal be structured?

Below, we give a suggested structure for the research proposal. There are five main sections.

Section One: Introduction

This section should be around 200 words in length.

In this section, you should aim to give a clear, concise description of your research idea. This requires some skill in writing economically and you may find it easier to complete your introduction after you have written a draft of the full proposal.

Section Two: Preliminary Literature Review

This section should be around 1500 words in length.

In this section you should give a brief summary of some of the academic literature that will inform your analysis of the issue or problem you present in the introduction. Try to answer the following questions. They are designed to make you think about the relationship between the existing academic literature and your own research idea.

- What are the main concepts introduced in this literature and how are they defined?
- What are the main questions this literature attempts to address?
- What are the different theories that exist in this literature?
- What is the empirical support for these theories?
- In what ways do you think this literature will help you understand more about the research idea you wish to research?

Avoid giving a history of the evolution of a concept or a body of knowledge (unless you are specifically interested in business history research). Instead, focus on the contemporary state of knowledge on your topic.

Section Three: Proposed Research Methodology

This section should be around 800 words in length.

In this section, you should outline the research methods you intend using to gather data for your research. It is important to ensure that the methods you choose give you the appropriate data to answer the research questions you pose in your introduction. For example, if you want to explore a process, as opposed to a structure or an outcome, i.e. how a certain situation was arrived at over time, qualitative analysis may be more appropriate than quantitative analysis. If you want to assess a

general mood or attitude across a large group of individuals, quantitative analysis would be a suitable technique. Remember, however, that quantitative and qualitative research methods are not mutually exclusive and you may feel that a mixed methodology is appropriate.

Try to answer the following questions. They may help you to clarify your proposed methodological approach.

- Whose opinions, attitudes and beliefs do you want to assess (i.e. who will provide the raw data for your research)?
- Why will these data help you answer the research questions you've posed?
- Do you want to see how these individuals' attitudes have changed over time, what their attitudes are about a particular event or situation?
- It is important to mention any obstacles you perceive as impacting upon your research plan.

Section Four: Justification for Proposed Research

This section should be around 1000 words in length

In this section, you should discuss why you feel your research ideas are important. If you are applying to the Professional Doctoral Programme, you should relate your research idea to your professional experience to demonstrate its relevance. You should discuss the potential application of your research in your own organisation or in professional practice more generally. If you are applying to the PhD programme, your focus in this section can also be on practical application of research outcomes but you should also address how you feel your research could contribute to existing academic knowledge on your chosen topic.

Section Five: Preliminary Bibliography

This section is not included in the total word count for the research proposal

In this section, you should give an alphabetical list of all published material you have read on the issue you intend researching. For the most part, you should confine your reading to academic research published in academic journals.

How to Submit the Research Proposal

Please note that these are general guidelines. There may be additional, discipline-specific, information that you should also supply. Before you submit your research proposal, you should contact a faculty member within your discipline for further advice.

You should submit your research proposal along with your completed application form to:

PhD Programme:

**Ms Rachel Keegan
Dublin City University Business School
DCU, Dublin 9**

**Professional Doctoral
Programme:**

**Ms Catherine Gallagher
The Registry
DCU, Dublin 9**