Preparation for PhD

Proposal Writing

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Origin of the qualification
1860

James Morris Whiton

“Brevis vita, ars longa”

1 year, 6 pages (in Latin)

Today

Predissertation requirements:

First two years: 12 term courses
Two qualifying papers (III year)
Teach: III and IV year
Approval of the dissertation prospectus

Completion of PhD Degree: 5 to 6 Years
What is a PhD?

a PhD is a demonstration of research competence

- Mastery of your subject
- Research insight
- Respect for the discipline
- Capacity for independent research
- Ability to communicate results and relate them to the broader discourse
What is a PhD?

• Research training leading to a professional research qualification

• It involves a substantial chunk of research, writing it up and then discussing it with professional academics

• You have a supervisor, but it is something for which you take the initiative

• The process is rarely smooth
What is your motivation to do a PhD?
Wanting to do a PhD

Why am I doing this?
How can I carry on?

If you have to ask yourself what sacrifices you have to make to win, you’re already losing races
Main motivations

- My interest in the subject: 36.9%
- Improving my career for an academic/research job: 30.5%
- It felt like a natural step: 12.7%
- Improving my career outside academy/research: 8.4%
- I was encouraged by a former academic tutor: 4.5%
- Available funding: 3.1%
- Other: 2.6%
- I felt inspired to work with a particular academic: 1.4%

LSE PRES 2011: 97,571 students surveyed
When to do a PhD

After Master
High intellectual and academic momentum

After First Job
Time to reflect and think carefully about your reasons

Alongside a job
Cross-pollination
## Writing a research proposal

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Writing a PhD Research Proposal

What is a PhD proposal?

- Outline of your proposed project that is designed to:
  - Define a clear question and approach to answering it
  - Highlight its originality and/or significance
  - Explain how it adds to, develops (or challenge) existing literature in the field
  - Persuade potential supervisors and/or funders of the importance of the work, and why you are the right person to undertake it
Choosing & Developing a PhD Topic

How viable is it for a PhD project?

A big topic must turn into a manageable research question

**Patience**

Your research question probably will change

**Humility**

Keep the topic to a manageable level

**Flexibility**

Accept changes, adjust, improve, etc...
Format and content of a proposal

Title

Include important key words

Go beyond simply describing the subject matter - give an indication of your approach or key questions

Name
University
Faculty
Programme
Ph.D. Proposal
Format and content of a proposal

Overview of the research

Where does it fit within the existing academic discourses, debates, or literature?

Sketch out the context into which your work will fit

Problem statement

Research questions (including the reasons for asking them)

The major approach(es) you will take (conceptual, theoretical, empirical and normative)

Significance of the research
The statement of the problem must be expressed with the utmost precision. Then it must be divided into more manageable subproblems. Such an approach clarifies the goals and directions of the entire research effort.
Positioning of the research

Discuss the literature which you believe are most important to the PhD research

Demonstrate your understanding of the research issues

Identify existing gaps (both theoretical and practical)

Contextualise the research questions, not to provide a detailed analysis of existing debates
Format and content of a proposal

Theoretical and conceptual framework

Provide a general and specific representation of relationships between things in a given phenomenon

**Theoretical framework**: dwells on tested theories that embody the findings of numerous investigations on how phenomena occur

**Conceptual framework**: embodies the specific direction by which the research will have to be undertaken. It describes the relationship between specific issues identified in the study
Format and content of a proposal

Research Design and Methodology

It lays out the way in which you will structure your research and the specific methods you will use

The parameters of the research (i.e. the definition of the subject matter)

A discussion of the overall approach (e.g. theoretical, does it involve empirical research?)

Specific aims and objectives

A brief discussion of the timeline
In Summary

Choose a topic

Title

Overview of the research

Problem statement
Research questions
Literature/Discourse/Debate

Research approach

Conceptual/Theoretical/Empirical
Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Research design and methods

Be motivated

Find the right time to do it
“There is quip that when you start a PhD you know a little about everything, and by the end you know a lot about nothing”

Marshal & Green, Your PhD Companion
References


