

Some Suggestions for Writing a Thesis Proposal

1. Introduction

The thesis proposal is an integral part of your application as it indicates your capacity for independent graduate-level study.

When preparing your thesis proposal, it might be helpful to consider the following points.

Note: These following comments are based on The Editorial Committee of The Japan Association of Cultural Policy Research, *How to Write Contributed Papers, and the “Manners” of Journal Contributions* (originally in Japanese), available at <http://www.jacpr.jp/?p=846> (last visited on April 3, 2019).

2. Purpose of the Research & Thesis Title

The purpose or objective of the research is a prerequisite of any academic work. It is necessary to identify a proper purpose/objective of the paper, building on the background of the issue, an awareness of the problems, previous research, etc.

Simply indicating a general issue, topic, or theme is not a research proposal. For example, “The International Criminal Court” indicates a field of research, whereas “Prosecutorial Discretion in the Rules of Procedure and Evidence of the International Criminal Court” indicates the thesis’s focus more precisely.

We understand that the focus may change after starting the research, but the best proposals will have a clear focus. They don’t just indicate a general issue or topic. Similarly, the thesis title should reflect this clear focus.

3. Previous Academic Research

In finding a purpose and focus, the most important source of ideas should be previous research.

A master’s thesis should be a piece of academic research and not a policy paper. Please try to identify the leading researchers working in the field and consult their main works and ideas. A good proposal will demonstrate familiarity with the current academic debate, identify limits in the current discussion, and indicate how this project will add value to that discussion and move the debate forward.

In particular, a research topic should be chosen because a critical aspect has not been clarified in the previous research, OR it is worth elucidating “missing parts” of the research topic. By identifying an issue that needs to be explained or elucidated, a proposal indicates that the research will make an original contribution and move the debate forward in a specific field.

In addition, a thesis proposal involving a topic that you have studied before or is connected to a subject you have studied before is more persuasive. A master’s thesis should *not* be viewed as an opportunity to learn something completely new or study something for the first time. At least, such a proposal is less credible than a proposal that builds on your previous studies or research. We do not expect you to be an expert already but demonstrating some relevant prior knowledge will significantly improve the quality of your proposal.



A good way to signal your familiarity with previous research is to include a bibliography, but simply listing previous research is not enough. Instead, as suggested above, you are expected to present what, and to what extent, other researchers have already clarified the issues concerning the purpose of the research and – crucially – identify areas where the debate can be developed in a new direction.

Finally, we often commit a fallacy that *no previous research* exists in our research field. Relevant previous research exists in *all* research. It may require some effort or imagination to find it, but it is out there.

4. Methodology

The purpose of research refers to *what* we should analyze based on previous research. The methodologies mean *how* we should investigate.

Please think about the methodological approach. This may, for example, be conceptual, comparative, or rely on other disciplines, such as economics or sociology. Some explanation of how your methodology is connected to the purpose of the research – i.e., how it helps achieve the research objective – adds credibility to any proposal.

5. Analysis/Discussion & Thesis Structure

Even though this is a proposal, it is sensible to communicate your current thinking on the analysis and argumentation. This establishes your credibility and capacity to implement the project successfully.

Analysis/discussion should be a necessary and minimum statement to answer the purpose of the research. The author should NOT include all kinds of information clarified through the survey, etc., nor write about private issues, including the history of the research, author's future plans, author's personal impressions, etc.

It is often helpful in a proposal to include a chapter structure indicating the chapter titles and sub-sections. Titles should be clear and communicate the content and logical flow of your ideas.

6. Final Thoughts

A thesis proposal that connects with your previous study, previous work experience (if you have any), or future career plans is more convincing. The strongest candidates can tell a coherent story that “joins the dots” between what they have done already in their education and work, their thesis proposal, and what they plan to do in the future.

Please consult Kyushu University's international programs in law faculty page to see if there are any faculty members with expertise in your proposed field. A proposal that connects with the teaching or research interests of a faculty member is also more persuasive.

We understand that writing a good proposal is difficult, but please consider the above points before submitting your application.

