Research Proposal - guidelines

The research proposal is your chance to demonstrate to Luther King Theological College and York St John University that you are capable of conducting the research successfully within the time allowed. It needs to allay any doubts that we might have. Each section in the proposal should help us to see how you can do this research.

Typically, research proposals should be around 1,500 words, excluding bibliography.

Please use the following format:

- Working title
- Research question
- Provisional thesis statement
- Motivation
- Location of your research in the current scholarship, and its significance
- Scope of the research
- Methodology
- Provisional outline
- Bibliography

Working title

This should accurately reflect the nature and scope of your research. It will almost certainly be adjusted during your research, but it will be one of the ways that the University tracks your registration and should be considered carefully.

Research Question

State the research question as clearly, concisely and precisely as possible. What will the research enable you to find out or discover? Avoid generic questions, or questions that could be answered simply by accumulating data. The question should be an issue to be addressed or problem to be solved. In constructing the question, remember that it needs to be answerable within the three years full-time or six years part-time study period for the PhD. The research question will also be tied to your suggested contribution to research or scholarship. Of course, the question may well be nuanced in the course of your research, but if it is clear from the outset, it will help you avoid straying into interesting, but irrelevant (for the thesis) by-paths. Within the overall research question you may also want to address a variety of research goals – include them briefly here too.

Provisional thesis statement

The thesis statement is a brief answer to the research questions. It should encapsulate the provisional direction your answers are likely to take. It needs to be written in clear and precise terms, which means you need to reflect carefully on the words you chose. A good thesis statement will, therefore, be no more than about 50 words in length. You will

discover, no doubt, that writing an adequate statement in such a short space is more difficult than you imagined, but, together with the research question, it's the most important statement in the proposal.

Motivation

Why do *you* want to do *this* research?

Location of your research in the current scholarship and its significance

How does your research fit in to what others have already done? You should show here that you have done sufficient preliminary reading and know some key (probably no more than 5 or 10) texts or primary sources. What new contribution to knowledge will it bring (PhDs must contribute something new)? What is the significance of your research? Where might it lead in the future? The current scholarship with which you will interact should also be reflected in the bibliography (see below).

Scope of the research

This sets the parameters of your research. If the Bible is involved, will you be covering all of it, or the Pauline letters, or one letter? If people are involved, which group? What period of time will you be examining? What methods will you be restricting yourself to? If conducting qualitative research, include an estimated timeline.

Methodology

How will you address the research question? Will you be carrying out quantitative or qualitative research? Will you use interviews, surveys, autoethnographic etc? What approach to the Bible will you use – feminist, historical, narrative, postcolonial, rhetorical etc? Be as precise as possible. Your choice of methodology should also be reflected in the bibliography (see below).

For any research with human subjects, please also include an indication as to how you will address any ethical issues that arise. This should also be reflected in the bibliography (see below).

You should also identify any research problems you anticipate, and how you intend to address them (e.g., needing to acquire reading knowledge of a language).

Working outline

Provide an outline of how you see the shape of the thesis at the moment (it will change during your research). What do you expect that the different chapters will cover? Include a proposed outline of chapters with a few key headings in each chapter.

Bibliography

Provide a bibliography. This should include key primary and secondary sources, and should probably be between 20 and 35 sources, including the key texts you have referred to within the earlier sections of your proposal. It should cover not just the subject area, but also (where appropriate) methodology and ethical issues. The bibliography should demonstrate that you are aware of the major books and articles relevant to your research, and be formatted in line with academic conventions.

See also https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/research/apply/examples-of-research-proposals/ for some examples of research proposals in other areas.