



School of Humanities and Social Science
Supplementary Information
For MPhil / PHD PROGRAMS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

All **PhD** applicants **MUST** submit with their applications a **proposal** for the research that they wish to conduct in the program. Applicants without a proposal will not be processed. The proposal should be typed, double spaced.

All **MPhil** applicants are expected to submit with their applications a **proposal** for the research that they wish to conduct in the program. The proposal should be typed, double spaced. **In lieu of a research proposal, MPhil applicants MAY submit both a personal statement AND a writing sample.**

(I) FOR PhD/ MPhil APPLICANTS:

Research Proposal

The MPhil proposal should be approximately 6-8 pages in length, and the PhD proposal 10-12 pages.

Applicants should follow the guidelines stated below. In addition, applicants may, if they wish, submit samples of their written work relating to their research interests.

What is a Proposal ?

Think of a proposal as a blue-print – a mini-version of the thesis that you would like to eventually write. The proposal should be written in the form of an essay, not a list. It should contain:

1. Statement of Purpose
2. Research Questions
3. Literature Review
4. Statement of Significance
5. Research Methodology

Statement of Purpose

Be *specific*, rather than general. A proposal that reads, "I intend to study China's social and economic development" is too general. A statement that proposes "to examine the change in women's roles in China by studying women who started their own businesses in Jiangsu province" is specific. Include in your statement something that you already know about the topic you intend to study.

Research Questions

These should be framed as questions, or hypotheses. They should not be statements or descriptions. Here are some examples for phrasing questions :

- What are the major determinants of women's success in the job market?
- Why are there variations in women's earnings across three provinces?
- What does the changing role of gender play in early 20th century Chinese fictions?

Literature Review

Say how other scholars have tried to answer the questions that you mention above. The literature review must be *relevant* to the questions you are asking. For example, if you want to know how women's lives have changed as a result of starting a business in China, you do not need to review all the literature on China's political and economic reforms. Instead, you want to locate the literature on how women's lives are affected by the development of market economies.

Statement of Significance

Think about the overall implications of your work. Look beyond how undertaking the degree will help you personally. PhD or MPhil theses may have several implications. Consider the following:

1. They may contribute to a body of *academic* literature. They may, for instance, advance a neglected theoretical position.
2. They may have *practical* or *policy* implications. For example, they may change the way that a certain group of people practice their occupation, handle their clients or deal with their work.
3. They may make a *political* statement or a *cultural* critic. They may point to an injustice, an inequality, or a contradiction.

But be *realistic*. It is not realistic to claim that your work will, say, transform the educational system in Hong Kong. It may be realistic, however, to say that your thesis will help explain why students often fail to live up to teachers' expectations.

Research Methodology

Research methodology concerns the manner by which data are collected. Documentation, observation, in-depth interview, survey, and statistical data are the main methods of data collection in the social sciences.

Your methodology must be *appropriate* to the questions you are asking. That is, you must show how the methods you use will answer the questions you are asking. If you want to study recreational drug use in Hong Kong, for example, it would not be appropriate to study only youth in your housing estate who do not take drugs.

Further, your methodology must be *feasible*. A proposal to interview workers from 500 factories in Shenzhen is not feasible--in the time that you have to complete the degree. It may, however, be feasible to interview workers from ten factories, or obtain production statistics from 500 enterprises.

Finally, your methodology must be *detailed*. For example, if you plan to do a survey, how many people do you plan to include in your sample? And how will you decide which people to sample?

Further Reading

Applicants may wish to consult the following texts for more ideas about writing a proposal and other aspects of thesis writing.

Becker, Howard S., Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986).

Davis, Gordon and Clyde Parker, Writing the Doctoral Dissertation: A Systematic Approach. (Barron's Educational Series Inc. 1979). ISBN 0-8120-0997-5

Mauch, James E., Guide to the Successful Thesis and Dissertation: A Handbook for Students and Faculty (New York: Marcel Dekker, 2003). ISBN 0-8247-4288-5

Sternberg, David, How to Complete and Survive A Doctoral Dissertation (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981). ISBN 0-312-39606-6

(II) FOR MPhil APPLICANTS:

In lieu of a research proposal, applicants MAY submit both a personal statement AND a writing sample. We emphasize that if the applicant chooses this alternative, they must submit **BOTH the personal statement and the writing sample**, not one or the other. The expectations for the personal statement and the writing sample are similar to those of programs overseas that require these items as part of the application.

Personal Statement

The personal statement should explain the applicant's reasons for applying to the program, their research interests, the origin of those interests, and their long-term career plans, including whether they plan to seek a PhD. It should explain how they think the MPhil program at HKUST will contribute to the achievement of their goals. The statement should be in English, and the equivalent of 3-5 single-spaced pages.

Writing Sample

The writing sample should be a research paper or manuscript that demonstrates the applicant's ability to define a research question, summarize relevant literature, locate and analyze data or evidence appropriate to the task at hand, conduct an analysis, interpret results, and reach a conclusion consistent with the evidence. It must be in English, and it must be sole-authored by the applicant. The writing sample must have a research component. Essays, reflections, opinion pieces, or literature reviews are not acceptable. The sample should be the equivalent of 10-20 single-spaced pages.