

OVERVIEW:

The purpose of the PhD proposal is to focus and formulate the student's research plan. The proposal should provide a clear, concise description of the proposed thesis research activities. The proposal should demonstrate evidence of plans to make an original contribution to knowledge (in the student's field) and communicate a research plan that is feasible and worthwhile.

Qualities of strong proposals include:

- Linkage of the proposed research to relevant theory and previous research literature
- Demonstration of mastery of major schools of thought relevant to the field
- Explanation of the theoretical/conceptual basis of the proposed studies (research aims)
- Detailed description of the methodological approach(es)
- Articulation of ethical considerations (including sex and gender and EDI factors), as well as
- Research implications

WRITTEN PROPOSAL ELEMENTS:

The content of the proposal will be similar to that of a modified Tri-Council grant application; see [Research Proposal Instructions](#) for a CIHR Project Grant. The proposal should be approximately 12-15 pages single-spaced, excluding list of references and additional documents in the Appendices (e.g., data forms, consent forms). Relevant figures and tables may be included in the text. Specific formatting requirements are:

- **Font:** 12 point or larger. black type. Do not use condensed/narrow font sizes or type.
- **Density:** Smaller text in tables, charts, figures, and graphs is acceptable, as long as it is legible when the page is viewed at 100%.
- **Line spacing:** A minimum of single line spacing.
- **Margins:** Not to be less than 2 cm (3/4 inch) on all sides.

A proposal is likely to contain most of the elements listed below, although the supervisor and/or supervisory committee may require the inclusion or omission of sections based on the scholarly traditions and conventions of the student's particular field of study. Students must check with their supervisor and supervisory committee about the required elements and headings to be used in the proposal.

Normally, the thesis proposal includes the following elements:

- Brief summary of research in the form of **Specific Aims** (1 page)
- **Problem and Rationale:** A clear description of the underlying problem/ gap including justification for the work, relevance and importance of the work, and an explanation of how addressing the research questions/ aims will advance the relevant field.
- **Background Information, Theoretical Framework, and Objectives/Hypotheses:** Background Information and Theoretical Framework typically include a concise and critical review of the theoretical and empirical research literatures. Usually, following the literature, a theoretical model / framework is proposed that ties together study concepts and/or perspectives. A clear purpose statement and study objectives should also be included. Specific research questions should be articulated. Some proposals may also include research hypotheses.
- **Design and Methods:** The selected study design should be specified to address the research questions. Rationale for the design should be provided, including merits and limitations. Sampling procedures are specified with justification. If appropriate, sample size should also be specified and justified. Data collection methods should be described in detail and justified. Conceptual definitions should be clearly

described and, if appropriate, operational definitions should be specified as well as methods of measurement and psychometric properties of measures. As appropriate, how data will be managed, coded, entered, and readied for analyses should all be clearly described. If pilot testing is required, procedural details should be provided.

- **Data Analysis:** The methods of analysis appropriate for the study design should be clearly described and justified, in detail.
- **Ethical Considerations:** The plan for seeking ethical approval must be clearly articulated. If appropriate, usually, draft consent forms are appended to the proposal.
- **Sex and Gender Considerations:** Sex and gender are defined in the document and are considered appropriately in the design of the study.
- **References:** Only sources cited in the proposal text should be included. Referencing style for in text citations and the reference list must be according to an accepted style and used consistently throughout the proposal.
- **Timeline/Work Plan:** Students must attach a detailed one-page (maximum) timeline / work plan identifying plans for timely completion of each phase of the thesis, up to estimated time to complete the final oral exam.
- **Appendices**