

How to apply for a PhD Program/Graduate School?

Presenters:

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Application materials:

- Academic Transcripts
- Personal Statement (some universities)
- Letters of Recommendation (usually 3)
- Research Statement/Proposal
- Academic CV
- Language tests (IELTS, TOEFL)
- GRE (Graduate Records Exam, only US universities require this exam)



Research proposals: differences between the USA and Australian/European universities

- Research proposal is not always required for PhD study **in the USA**. If it is, it will be much simpler than a full research proposal. You will only need to give a general sense of your research interests and possible directions you might like to pursue. The specific details for your project will be developed later in your programme and put forward as part of your research prospectus.
- However, many other European and Australian universities require a well-written PhD proposal.
- If your PhD is advertised by a university, you probably won't need to submit a research proposal for it. The broad aims and objectives for your PhD will already be defined: you just need to prove you're the right person to do it.
- But, if you're proposing your own research topic to research within a university's PhD programme, you will need to write a proposal for it (the clue is in the word "proposing")



Key factors to consider for writing research proposal:

- meeting the expected word count (this can range from a 1-page maximum to a 3000-word minimum depending on your supervisor and research area)
- making your bibliography as detailed as necessary
- outlining the research questions, you'll be trying to solve/answer
- discussing the impact your research could have on your field
- conducting preliminary analysis of existing research on the topic
- documenting details of the methods and data sources you'll use in your research
- introducing your supervisor(s) and how their experience relates to your project.

Writing research proposal:

Nobody's asking you to reinvent the wheel when it comes to writing your PhD proposal – leave that for your actual thesis. For now, while you're just working out how to write a PhD proposal, examples are a great starting point.

What makes this tricky is that proposals can vary greatly by field and disciplinary norms, so you should check with your proposed supervisor to see if they have a specific format or list of criteria to follow. Part of writing a good PhD proposal is submitting it in a style that's familiar to the people who will read and (hopefully) become excited by it and want to bring you into their research area.

Ask your planned supervisor for advice

- approach your potential supervisor(s) and find out if:
 - they have time to supervise you
 - they have any funds to help pay for your research (even with a stipend scholarship, your research activities may require extra money)
 - their research interests align with yours (you'll ideally discover a mutual ground where you both benefit from the project).



Find the “why” and focus on it



“One of the key aspects of your research proposal is emphasising why your project is important and should be funded.”

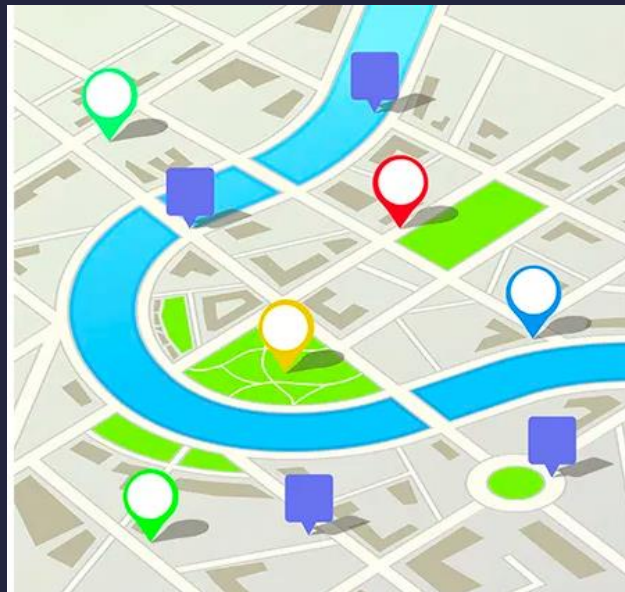
Sarah Kendall
UQ PhD Candidate

Graduate School 101: General Tips



Graduate School

- Enigmatic process
- Daunting!
- But! There are general considerations to have in mind





General things to keep in mind



- Average graduation time in your department
 - Does it vary by subfield?
- Graduate student placement
- What kind of support is available
 - Funding package/Scholarship
 - TA-ship (TA=teaching assistant)
 - RA-ship (RA=research assistant)
- Summer salary
- What you want to do with that degree



Graduate School Adviser



- Mentoring style
 - Hands off/on, micromanaging...
 - Something to ask during the interview
- Keep track of progress
 - Weekly meetings, meetings on demand, Slack, etc.
- What are their expectations for you
- Discuss your career goals after the PhD
 - Tenure-track
 - Alt-ac



Plan your project

- Can you choose your research topic
 - Some graduate programs expect the PhD students to design their own projects
 - Others have graduate students working on the PI's project
- Is your proposed work going to involve
 - Field work
 - Lab work
 - Additional training
- How long will the research and write-up take



Fund your research

- Grants
 - Research costs
- Fellowships
 - Your salary
- Eligibility varies!
- Get to know your Program Officer
 - They are on your side, ask them questions, build a relationship
- Budget for grants
 - Often has to be approved by the "Business Office"
 - Avoid overlapping funding



Learn how you work best

- What are your 'productive' hours
- How much rest do you need per week?
- Are you a team worker or prefer to do things on your own?
- How much guidance do you need?
- Do not forget about exercising and spending time with friends and family



Manage your time



- Budget your time efficiently
 - Juggle between teaching, taking classes, research, writing grants/publications
- Set side set time periods for specific tasks
 - Writing, Lab work, Coding
- Figure out how long it takes you to complete the tasks
- Some tasks are better done in the morning, others in the afternoon
 - I prefer to write first thing in the morning, and do my coding in the afternoon/evening
- Be realistic about your time. It's okay to drop tasks!



Conferences



- When is a good time to go?
- Several conferences will be relevant to you based on your research interest
- Find out what conferences your adviser and others in your PhD program usually attend
- Good to attend even if you are not presenting
- There are ways to support yourself if the department/PI is not going to cover you
 - E.g. volunteer at the conference

Networking

- Go to conferences
- Volunteer to host visiting speakers
 - Usually, departments have symposia through which speakers are invited to present
- Co-organize local conferences and workshops
- Email people whose research you like
 - You never know, this person might be your future collaborator or postdoc adviser
- Use social media: Twitter, Facebook, etc.





Your cohort/lab is your 'family'



- You will go through a similar experience together
- These people will understand your worries and concerns
- You can help each other by forming study groups and writing circles
- Life-long friendships
- Future and current collaborators
- Extremely helpful resource!



Committee members

- Be strategic about this decision
- Keep in mind their expertise
- Consider their work style and expectations
- Make sure they satisfy the requirements from your graduate school/department
 - External candidate
 - Affiliation with the department/school





Preliminary/Comprehensive exams



- Some PhD programs have an exam/procedure that's necessary to complete in order to become a PhD candidate
- The format varies by institution and department
 - Writing a grant proposal
 - Writing a research proposal
 - Answering essay questions
 - Presenting your research proposal
- Don't panic!
 - Most people pass their comps and often have multiple tries
 - The point of the exam is to prepare you for a future as an academic




Keep your eye on the prize



- The point of a PhD is to get a PhD!
- Graduate school is there to prepare you and provide you with the necessary skills for what comes after the PhD
- Try to make the most out of this time
 - Read widely
 - Initiate side projects
 - Meet people in and outside your field



Before you graduate

- Approximately one year before your defense date
 - Create a writing plan that would allow you to finish on time
 - Start thinking about what you would like to do after the PhD
 - Talk to people in and out of academia to decide what route would suit you best
 - Attend career workshops
 - Start telling people that you will be looking for a job
 - Ask around if anyone is looking to hire soon
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Questions / Answers

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