

Modern East Asian Studies

Master of Arts

Guidelines for Writing a Research Proposal

1. General Remarks

A research proposal is not an essay but a description for a research project **which has not yet begun**. Instead of advancing a certain thesis, it should rather identify a research gap, raise a research question and advance reasons as to why an answer to this question is not only interesting but also how it supplements or improves the current research in its field. The most important feature of a research proposal is an **original idea**.

The aim of the research proposal in the MEAS application is to demonstrate your academic skills, your interest and prospective focus within the master programme. The proposal has to cover a topic within the regional and disciplinary range of the programme.

2. Structure

A) Opening

Title

The title should capture the most important features of a research proposal; it should be straightforward and easy to understand.

Abstract

The abstract should outline the essence of the whole research proposal in short and simple sentences. It should not be longer than 300 words.

Introduction

The introduction should not be longer than two paragraphs and should: i) explain the research topic in question; ii) justify its importance; and iii) account for its relevance in contrast to current research.

B) Main Part

State of research

This section should mention the most important works on the topic of the research proposal and state the most important results in the field. Moreover, it should identify the research gap that this project intends to fill.

Research question/hypothesis

This is the heart of the research proposal. This section should explain the research question and/or the hypotheses put forth with the research proposal. The main aim of this section is to explain its significance and novelty. The literature surveyed in the “state of research” is a major point of reference for this section, while the research gap serves as a starting-point. How does your project contribute to the previous knowledge in the field? How does it extend the understanding of a particular question or topic? Be precise when formulating the research question and/or hypotheses. You may also state sub-questions and/or sub-hypotheses. Explain what exactly you want to examine and why it is important. It is not enough to say something is interesting, let the reader (and the academic community) know why they should pay attention to your research.

Method

This section will sketch the method(s) employed in your research and its theoretical framework. How will you answer your research question and/or prove your hypotheses? Which sources will you use and how will you analyse them? For example: Will you conduct quantitative or qualitative interviews, and, if so, with whom and why? You have to explain why your methods can answer your research question and/or prove the hypotheses. This part of the research proposal should also show that your research project is feasible.

C) Bibliography

D) Optional Sections

Ethical considerations (for instance, in research concerned with interviewees)

Conclusion

3. Writing Style

Use a clear, simple and objective language. The proposal has to be written in English; make sure there are no writing mistakes.

Writing a research proposal is also about structuring your arguments in a meaningful way. The text leads the reader through the story, from argument A to B to C, properly using logical connectors such as “therefore”, “thus”, *etc.*. Read your text again to make sure that every chapter, every paragraph, is a package of coherent information explaining one specific aspect to the reader. All sections of the research proposal should be marked by headings.

Regarding formatting, references and writing style, please refer to our “Guidelines for Writing Seminar Papers & Master Theses” in the download section of our website.