

A&D Guidelines for Writing a Research Project Proposal

for applicants to the School of Art & Design's [MPhil](#), [MFA](#) or [PhD](#) Programs

PhD and Master by Research applicants to the School of Art & Design are required to submit a research project proposal approved by their nominated supervisor and attached as a separate document to their Expression of Interest (EOI) form. Research Project Proposals can be up to 3,000 words in length, excluding references.

You should discuss your proposal and work on drafts with a potential supervisor(s) who will be able to recommend relevant literature, thinkers, or practitioners in your field. Your proposal should establish the area of your research project, your central research question and the methods you will employ, and it should be organized around the headings below.

Research projects can be radical, bold, and unconventional. However, they must address a community of academics, professionals, artists, or designers. While it is not necessary to conform to the models, methodologies, or expectations of other fields, you must meet the academic conventions of Art or Design. It is important, especially for inter-and trans-disciplinary projects, that you contextualize your project within the field of Art and/or Design.

NB. Throughout this document the term 'thesis' refers to both the practical and written components of your PhD or Master by Research proposed project. Practice-led research applicants are required to submit with their EOI a portfolio of work, which should be relevant to the proposed project and can be referenced in the research project proposal.

PhD Projects

The principal criterion for the award of a PhD degree is that your final thesis constitutes an original contribution to knowledge.

To develop your project, you first need to determine the field to which you intend to make this contribution. This may be a distinct area of practice or theory (e.g., installation art or contemporary design theory) or an interdisciplinary field (e.g., medical design). Once you have established your field of inquiry and what is already known about your topic, please explain how your thesis may add knowledge of significance and relevance to the field. New knowledge may take the forms below, among others:

- Address a gap or bias in existing literature, such as researching an under-recorded artistic figure or scene.
- Apply a new method to an existing field, for example, by exploring Deleuze's concept of the event in relation to a new artist.
- Employ a practice-based approach, such as exploring a concept through a practice.

Master Projects (MFAs or MPhils)

In a Master by Research, you will demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of your topic in the context of your nominated field of practice. You will demonstrate how to locate your research in relation to the work of other theorists or practitioners engaged in the topic. Your thesis will contribute to the field by updating or bringing together the most recent developments on the topic.

You can review existing UNSW theses deposited in [UNSWWorks](#) to familiarise yourself with the aims, methods, and scopes of similar projects. Think of your proposal as an overview rather than an introduction to your research project. Strong applications demonstrate a clear alignment between the research problem, methodology and literature review. Similarly, if you submit visual support material (e.g., portfolio of work), provide connections between this material and your written by addressing how your research project builds on your previous/existing research and/or creative practice.

How to structure your Research Project Proposal

Working title of the project

Provide a working title that describes the nature of your project (e.g., 'Violence in contemporary Chinese art' or 'Utzon's interiors for the Sydney Opera House: the design development of the major and minor hall, 1958-1966').

Statement of the research problem and its significance

In this section, please identify the field of knowledge and subject area where your topic of research is situated, and identify clearly what research problem, question, or hypotheses your project will address. You should also state why the proposed research is significant and what contribution your work intends to make to the relevant field. For PhD applicants, this is where you state your potential or intended contribution to knowledge.

Research aims and objectives

Under 'research aims', please describe the broad goals you intend to achieve in the designated time frame. Under objectives, please describe what are the steps you intend to take to achieve these goals. If relevant, clarify how your current proposal expands on your previous research achievements (e.g., previous Honours or Masters research undertaken on a similar topic).

Preliminary review of literature and relevant practice

Your research project proposal needs to demonstrate that you are aware of the traditions and contemporary research or innovations in your chosen field. If relevant to your project, you should include discussion of creative practice in this section.

The purpose of a literature review is to firstly demonstrate your knowledge of your chosen field and then to assess the current state of knowledge in that field. You should establish key authors and methodologies, note similarities and divergences between positions and indicate gaps, limitations or biases in current knowledge. In addition to surveying and summarizing key positions, your writing should be focused, critical and evaluative. In this section, please indicate the achievements of earlier works – theoretical and/or practical – and what remains to be done. Your literature review should assist you in establishing the parameters of your project. Do mention and assess works that relate to your own, as you will be expected to be familiar with significant work that intersects with your project.

In a PhD proposal, as well as reviewing literature from art and/or design you may review literature from other fields (e.g., anthropology) and propose a contribution to knowledge by suggesting how art and/or design can interrogate an issue in ways that other approaches cannot.

In a Master by Research proposal, you need to demonstrate that you have identified relevant and up-to-date points of view on your topic and selected one/s that most closely resonate with your aims.

Proposed research methodology (how you plan to address the problem)

In this section, please discuss and give a rationale for the research method(s) you will adopt in your project, including method(s) for data collection and analysis, and practice-based research methods, if applicable.

There are many established research methodologies. At the School of Art & Design and the Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture, students can take research methodology courses and workshops to assist in the formulation of an appropriate method. In your proposal you need to provide a preliminary indication of how you plan to address the problem identified above.

Two key questions to consider are:

- How you will gather or generate data and/or information (e.g., archives, interviews, fieldwork, literature, experimentation, etc).
- What conceptual lenses you will employ to assess this data and/or information (e.g. through the lenses of Formalism, Feminism, Post-structuralism, etc)

Practice-based research proposals must consider how these two questions will relate to and inform creative work made during your candidature. Your approach should reflect your undergraduate training and methods established in your field. For instance:

- If you are a practitioner addressing social, political, cultural, scientific or philosophical questions, articulate how you do this through your creative practice.
- If you need to gather data, describe how you will go about this. This might involve archival research, interviews with stakeholders, or various other forms of fieldwork.

Some theses adopt a particular theoretical position inspired by key philosophers, thinkers, or practitioners. Rather than adopting an entire philosophy, you may propose to develop and extend specific concepts from certain writers and apply them to a particular area or within a particular practice. If you are doing this, describe which concepts are useful and how you will apply them to achieve a particular result.

NB. If you intend to undertake [research involving human participants](#) (e.g., interviews, surveys etc), please note that you will be required to submit an ethics clearance application before initiating any data collection via research involving human participants.

Projected timeline for completion of studies

Identify goals and milestones for each term of study, including major activities like fieldwork or ethics application and clearance. This should include an estimate of when research, writing and creative practice (if applicable) will be developed, sent to your supervisor for comment and completed.

NB: Please note that one year of postgraduate study at UNSW is divided in four terms. See the HDR Academic Calendar tab on this [page](#) for more information.

References used in the proposal and related to the field (in Chicago Author-Date style)

Information on any foreseeable research costs

If relevant please list foreseeable research costs (e.g., fieldwork, transcriptions, translations) and required resources (e.g., studio space, access to maker space, equipment, software etc).

NB. Neither the UNSW nor the School normally cover research costs. However, limited funds are available from the Faculty pending further application after enrolment.