

University of Macau

Department of History

Guidelines for Writing a Research Proposal

- ❖ No matter if you are an undergraduate or a graduate student, all students in the Department of History will have to write a research proposal. Undergraduate students need to write a Research Proposal before they start to write their Senior Thesis. MA students need to write a Research Proposal before they start to write their MA Thesis. And PhD students need to write a Research Proposal before they start to write their PhD Dissertation.
- ❖ Most students do not understand how to write a Research Proposal, nor do they understand its importance. Actually, one's research is only as good as one's proposal. An ill-conceived proposal dooms the project. A high quality proposal, however, not only promises success for the project, but also impresses your supervisor about your potential for doing research. A good Research Proposal can also serve as the basis for the Introduction to your BA Senior Thesis, MA Thesis, or PhD Dissertation.
- ❖ Your Research Proposal should have sufficient information to convince your supervisor and other readers that you have an important research topic, that you have a good grasp of the relevant literature and major issues, and that your methodology is sound.
- ❖ A good Research Proposal should address the following questions:
 - Why is the research important?
 - What methodology will you employ and why?
 - What will be the outcome/result of your research?
- ❖ *Length.* As a rough guide, the Research Proposal should be about 500-600 words in length for BA students; 1000 – 2000 words for MA students; and 3000 – 5000 words for PhD students (excluding Bibliography). This is only a rough guide. The proposal can be longer or shorter depending on the situation and approval of your Supervisor.
- ❖ Undergraduate and MA-level students must submit Research Proposals in English. PhD students writing their dissertation in English must submit their Research proposal in English, but those writing their dissertation in Chinese should submit their proposal in Chinese, with a 500-word abstract in English.
- ❖ Your Research Proposal should include the following elements:
 - *Title.* A clear and precise title indicating the scope of your proposed work. The title should be a window into your research project that tells the reader, in a few words, what it is all about. You do not need a title to begin writing a proposal. You can come up with it after you have defined all the parts of your research project. It will be clearer than what the title should be.
 - *Thesis Statement and Justification.* The thesis (or hypothesis) is one or two sentences placed at the beginning of the proposal that tells the reader what you want to accomplish and why the research is important. The thesis (or hypothesis) is what we refer to as “your argument”. It tells the reader, in a brief statement, what you want to find out or prove, and the problems or questions you intend to answer. You should begin this section with a general statement of the specific research problem or question. The general statement is followed by the rational or justification for choosing this problem or question. The justification clarifies to the reader why you chose this problem or question and why it is important that you answer it.
 - *Survey of Previous Literature.* In this section, you briefly summarize what studies (secondary sources) have been done before on the subject. Depending on the topic, you do not necessarily need to mention all of the previous studies, but it is important to talk about the most important

ones. You should mention the main scholars who have contributed to our current understanding of your topic, and briefly describe their major research findings and contributions. After summarizing what has done before, then state how your research will be different. Your study should be new and original and not simply repeat what others have already said and done.

Sources and Methodology. This part makes clear to the reader the sources you will use and how you will approach them (methodology). Here you should list the main primary sources that you will use and where they are located (libraries, archives, etc.). You should also state why these sources are important to your research. If they have been used before by other scholars, then you should state how your approach to them will be different from theirs. The approach (methodology) you use will affect the outcome of your work, so you should think carefully about this. Will you go through the sources in chronological order? Topically? Or just select randomly a number of entries? Will you employ a qualitative analysis? Quantitative analysis? Comparative analysis? If you are going to employ a method used in other related disciplines, such as economics, sociology, anthropology, literary theory, or art history, then you should state it in this section. After describing the sources and the methodology, then you should explain briefly why you have chosen this approach. How will it help your research and argument?

- *References.* At the end of your proposal you need to provide a brief Bibliography of the primary and secondary sources you plan to use in your research.

❖ Please use the standard form (next page) when writing your Research Proposal. Email your completed proposal to your supervisor.

**University of Macau
Department of History**

Research Proposal Form

Student Name (Chinese and English):

Student I.D. No.: _____ **Year Entered Program:** _____

Date: _____ **Degree Program: (circle ONE):** PhD MA BA

Proposal Title: _____

Proposal: Write your proposal in the boxed space below. You may use more pages if necessary. As a rough guideline, the proposal should be about 2 pages (double-spaced) for BA students, 4-8 pages (double-spaced) for MA students, and 10-20 pages (double-spaced) for PhD students. These are only rough guidelines. The length of the proposal may be longer or shorter according to the thesis supervisor's suggestions. You may write the proposal in another file, if you wish, and then paste it into the box below.