

Information Leaflet for International PhD Applicants: Writing a Research Proposal

While we encourage you to consult literature on how to write good proposals, it's important to keep in mind that literature in English or other languages is often written from, and for, its own academic systems. Although there are many similarities to German conventions, there can also be significant differences. For example, many English-language resources assume a proposal length of around 5 pages, which is only half of what we expect at the GCSC. Be careful about specific details such as word limits and make sure that your proposal is aligned with the GCSC's expectations. You can find these in slides 14-21 of the ["Your Application at the GCSC" script](#).

What is the point of a research proposal?

The proposal demonstrates to the GCSC Selection Committee and Reviewers the **relevance** and **feasibility** of your planned project. It should convey your expertise in the field and ability to tackle the topic, and provide an overview of your research question(s), aims, and approach.

Writing it will help you improve your grasp of the field and state of research and will sharpen your research questions and theoretical as well as methodological approaches – writing a proposal is an essential step of developing your own research project.

Preparing the proposal

"Before you start, please make sure once again that you understand the purpose of doctoral research: It is about completing a research project independently and making new findings available to the international research community. Research is always problem orientated. It is NOT about writing a book on a comprehensive topic compiling all available information, and it is NOT about advocating your (political) opinions" (DAAD, "How to Develop a Research Project and Write a Research Proposal")

At the GCSC (as in most German contexts), the development of your own PhD project is considered an important part of the dissertation process. Supervisors can guide you and provide advice on progress and problems, but you are expected to work independently and proactively. Supervisors will eventually also grade your PhD dissertation. This is in explicit contrast to other academic systems where supervisors provide much more intensive and substantial support, but are not involved in the grading.

While the project of course changes and develops over your time at the GCSC, you yourself are its main architect. We therefore expect to see an advanced and well-developed project proposal that clearly delineates your independent contribution.

GCSC Research Proposal Checklist

Please view this as a tool, not a rule. All aspects below should be included in your proposal, but they are thematic suggestions, not required headings. You may of course use different terminology or order, or add other aspects if your project demands.

- Title page with working title and contact information
- Table of contents
- Research objective
- Literature review
- Theoretical approach
- Methodology and method
- Preliminary structure
- Situating your project within the GCSC's research profile
- Bibliography
- Work Plan

Formal Requirements Checklist

- Text length max. 10 pages (plus bibliography + work plan)
- Consistent citation style
- Clear and consistent formatting according to academic standards in your field
- Page numbers
- Final proofreading
- Updated table of contents