

Guidelines

for

Writing a PhD Research Proposal

The preparation of a **1,500–2,000-word research proposal** is the first step in applying to the PhD in Law programme at Kathmandu University School of Law (KUSoL), whether on a **full-time or part-time basis**. The word limit **includes footnotes, appendices, figures, and tables**, but **excludes the reference list**.

A PhD research proposal is expected to demonstrate the applicant's understanding of the proposed research area, the significance of the research problem, and the intellectual direction of the study. In particular, a strong proposal should:

- demonstrate the **originality, relevance, focus, and researchability** of a legal issue or problem;
- propose a **clear, precise, and achievable methodology**;
- show **critical engagement with existing literature** in the field;
- exhibit **clarity, coherence, and logical organization** of ideas and arguments.

The proposal may include technical legal language where appropriate; however, it should generally be written in **clear and accessible academic prose**, avoiding unnecessary jargon.

The following components are recommended as core elements of the proposal. Applicants are encouraged to show intellectual creativity and coherence, provided all essential elements are clearly addressed.

1. Research Topic

The research topic should be stated as a **concise and precise phrase or declarative sentence**. It should focus on a single, clearly defined idea and avoid ambiguity or overly broad scope.

2. Research Questions

Applicants should formulate a **clear and well-defined main research question** suitable for doctoral-level inquiry. The research question should address an **unsettled or insufficiently explored legal problem** and be:

- original;
- analytically focused;
- relevant to the field; and
- feasible within the scope of a PhD.

The main research question may be supported by **sub-questions** that help structure the analysis. Research questions should go beyond descriptive inquiry and require **systematic and critical legal analysis**, including interpretation of legal texts, doctrine, case law, empirical evidence (where applicable), or theory.

3. Introduction / Research Context / Background

The introduction should establish the **broader legal and scholarly context** of the proposed research. It should explain how the study fits within existing and contemporary debates in the field and clearly identify the **research gap** the study seeks to address.

This section should:

- outline the motivation for the research;
- situate the topic within relevant legal, doctrinal, or socio-legal debates; and
- indicate the **potential contribution or impact** of the research on legal scholarship, policy, or practice.

4. Brief Literature Review

In research context, “literature” refers to **existing scholarly work**, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and relevant legal materials.

The literature review should:

- demonstrate the applicant's familiarity with **key scholarship** in the research area;
- critically engage with existing arguments and approaches rather than merely summarizing them;
- identify gaps, tensions, or limitations in existing literature that justify the proposed research.

Applicants are expected to engage with at least 20 piece of credible literature. Annotated bibliographies are not required; instead, the review should be analytically connected to the research problem.

5. Methodology

The proposal should clearly explain the **research methods** the applicant intends to use in order to answer the research questions.

Possible approaches include, but are not limited to:

- **doctrinal (library-based or black-letter law) research;**
- **empirical or field-based research;**
- **socio-legal, qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches.**

While quantitative methods are not typical in doctrinal legal research, applicants may propose them where appropriate. Regardless of the chosen approach, applicants must **justify why the proposed methodology is suitable and feasible** for the research problem and field of study.

Where relevant, applicants are encouraged to refer to **methodological literature** that informs their research design. Applicants are not expected to demonstrate full methodological expertise at this stage, but they should show a clear and reasoned understanding of their methodological choices.

6. Time Plan

Applicants should include a **provisional time plan**, presented either as a Gantt chart or a structured timeline of research activities. The time plan should reflect realistic planning across key stages such as literature review, data collection (if applicable), analysis, and writing.

Although timelines may be revised during the PhD, applicants are advised to present a **carefully considered and manageable schedule**.

7. References

The reference list should include **only works cited in the proposal**. A separate bibliography of consulted but uncited sources is not required.

Applicants may use **Bluebook or OSCOLA** referencing styles. Whichever style is chosen must be used **consistently throughout the proposal**.

Final Note

Applicants should treat the research proposal as an opportunity to **persuade the research committee of the academic value and feasibility of the proposed study**. The proposed research should aim to make a meaningful contribution to legal knowledge, whether through **theoretical analysis, doctrinal interpretation, empirical inquiry, or a combination of approaches**.

A well-prepared proposal will demonstrate intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and the potential to undertake independent doctoral research at KUSoL.