School of Humanities and Social Science
Supplementary Information
For MPHIL / PHD PROGRAMS IN HUMANITIES

All MPhil and PhD applicants must submit with their applications a proposal for the research that they wish to conduct in the program. Applications without a proposal will not be processed. The proposal should be typed and double spaced.

The MPhil proposal should be approximately 8 pages in length, and the PhD proposal 15 pages. Applicants should follow the guidelines stated below when preparing for their proposals. In addition, applicants are encouraged to submit samples of their written work relating to their research interests or published papers.

A proposal is a blue-print – a mini-version of the thesis that you would like to eventually write. The proposal should be written in the form of an essay, not a list. It should contain:

1. Statement of Purpose
2. Research Questions
3. Literature Review
4. Research Methodology
5. Statement of Significance

Statement of Purpose
Be *specific*, rather than general. The statement of purpose tells the readers the main research question you attempt to answer. A proposal that reads, "I intend to study China's social and economic development in history", "to study Chinese literati painting", "to study Confucianism", or ""to study the rhyming patterns in Old Chinese", is too general. A statement that proposes "to examine the change in women's roles in modern China by studying the changing media images of businesswomen in Shanghai from the 1900s to the 1930s", "to investigate different types of artist-patron transactions in Chinese painting", "to explain and analyze the relationship between virtue and happiness in Confucian ethics", or "to reconstruct the sound system in Old Chinese by scrutinizing the rhyming patterns in the *Book of Songs*" is specific. The subject of inquiry should be something that interests you and enhances our understanding of a broader topic. To address an issue that has never been attempted and to approach a controversial topic from a new angle are both worthy undertakings. A good way to identify a main research question is to conduct a library search.

Research Questions
The specific subject of inquiry should be embedded under a *broader topic* in the form of *questions* or *hypotheses*. Examples of research questions are: What were the media images of businesswomen in Shanghai from the 1900s to the 1930s? To what extent do the changing media images reflect the roles of businesswomen in reality? What is the sound system of Old Chinese like? How was the sound system of Old Chinese developed into that in Middle Chinese? These research questions can be further used to study a broader topic such as: Modern Chinese business history or gender history, or the sound system in Old Chinese or the sound changes from Old Chinese to Middle Chinese.

Literature Review
Say how other scholars have tried to answer the questions that you mention above. The literature review must be *relevant* to the questions you are asking. For example, if you want to know how women's lives have changed as a result of starting a business in China, you do not need to review all the literature on China's political and economic reforms. Instead, you want to locate the literature on how women's lives are affected by the development of market economies. Always paraphrase the original work with proper citation.

Research Methodology

Research methodology concerns the manner by which data are collected. Documentation, textual analysis, observation, in-depth interview, survey and statistical data are the main methods of data collection in humanities.

Your methodology must be *appropriate* to the questions you are asking. That is, you must show how the methods you use will answer the questions you are asking. For example, it would not be appropriate to do a longitudinal study of the changing media images of businesswomen since the 1900s when a specific timeframe is chosen, e.g. from the 1900s to the 1930s.

Further, your methodology must be *feasible*. One cannot conduct a large-scale interview if the subject of inquiry is the changing role of businesswomen in Shanghai from the 1900s to the 1930s when interviewees from the specific timeframe may not be easy to recruit.

Finally, your methodology must be *detailed*. For example, what are the data to be analyzed? How will the data be processed? Are you using the approach of textual analysis, philology, comparison, etc.? Are you using qualitative and quantitative methods such as survey, interview, statistics or participant observation?

Statement of Significance

The statement of significance tells the readers why your subject of inquiry is a worthy undertaking. PhD or MPhil theses should make contribution to scholarship and advance our knowledge of the subject matter. Some examples are as follows:

1. Contribution to scholarship by advancing a neglected theoretical position, or a new position.
2. Contribution to scholarship by discovering new empirical facts, new interpretation, new way of integration of existing knowledge.
3. Contribution to scholarship by critically unmasking fallacies of existing knowledge.

Further Reading

Applicants may wish to consult the following texts for more ideas about writing a proposal and other aspects of thesis writing.

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). ISBN 0226065650

Clark, Irene L., *Writing the Successful Thesis and Dissertation*: *Entering the Conversation*. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2007). ISBN: 0131735330

The items below are short guides to writing a paper in history, philosophy, arts, and literature.

http://writingproject.fas.harvard.edu/files/hwp/files/bg_writing_history.pdf

http://philosophy.fas.harvard.edu/files/phildept/files/brief_guide_to_writing_philosophy_paper.pdf

Barnet, Sylvan. *A Short Guide to Writing about Art*. 10th ed. (New Jersey: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2011). ISBN 0205708250

Barnet, Sylvan, *A Short Guide to Writing about Literature*. 12th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2012). ISBN 0205118453