

Master's Thesis Proposal Guidelines

First-year master's students in EAS are required to submit a thesis (research) proposal early in their program. The deadlines are March 15 for September starts, and September 15 for January starts.

- The supervisor assists the student in preparation of the proposal. The proposal should be written in such a way that an educated reader, who may not necessarily be a specialist in that particular research area, can understand the gist of your research and why it is significant. At the same time, the writing should be sufficiently technically detailed, especially when it comes to methodology, that an expert reader will be convinced that you know what you are doing and that the proposed research is feasible.
- Maximum length is 3,000 words (not including references, figures or tables). The word count is to be listed on the title page. Formatting guidelines are a font of Times New Roman 12 or equivalent, 2.5 cm margins, and double line spacing. The proposal can include figures. Up to 3 figures and 3 tables can be included.
- The proposal should explicitly state the problem being addressed or gap in knowledge to be filled, describe the objectives and research techniques to be employed, and include a review of the principal relevant published literature. Details of funding (i.e., a budget), together with a program schedule (timetable for completion) should also be included. It is appropriate to attach a copy of applications by the student to an outside agency for funding of the research.
- Failure to submit an acceptable thesis proposal can be considered as unsatisfactory performance in a degree program, and may be referred to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research.

Some Tips

- Having to prepare this proposal is part of your graduate training. It is an opportunity to organize your thoughts about your research topic, to decide how you will pursue the work, and to spell out what resources (financial, material, and technical) you need to carry out the research. The writing of a project proposal is an exercise that you will repeat many times in your professional career. The ability to “sell” a project convincingly is a crucial part of your graduate education.
- The Introduction should give a clear understanding of what the proposal is about, why the work is worth doing, and how the results will contribute to general knowledge in that research discipline. It provides context within which the rest of the proposal is read. Invest time in getting this section right, and the rest is relatively easy.

- The proposal needs a thread of logic. It should build from a statement of the research problem or gap in knowledge, and follow an outline of detailed objectives that must be achieved (or questions that must be answered) if the problem is to be solved. The presentation of methodology should be clearly connected to the stated objectives.
- The literature review must be up to present date. Discuss published work pertinent to the proposal – i.e., that literature needed to define the research problem, describe the study area, or explain the choice of methods to be employed. ***Do not break this out as a separate review section:*** make it a section that supports your case for doing the work.
- Provide an assessment of the likely significance of the work. How will it advance our understanding or thinking? What gap will it fill? What technical breakthrough will it produce?
- You may require a number of iterations to produce a final version of the proposal. Your supervisor has a responsibility to provide you with feedback on the writing before you submit it, but you must in turn be professional in providing her or him with enough time to do this. A few days before the deadline is not appropriate - if you are in doubt about how long is needed, discuss this in advance with your supervisor.