

Useful information for writing a research proposal for the PhD in International Business and Strategy

We receive a high number of applications for the PhD programme in International Business and Strategy, approximately 90% of which are rejected. Almost all the applications we reject are the result of an inadequate research proposal.

As a guide, the research proposal should have 1500-3000 words. Below is an outline of the elements a research proposal might typically contain:

Cover Page - including a title and name of the applicant. The cover could also include the name of a proposed supervisor, if known.

Introduction - a brief explanation of the proposed research, why it is of value and how it is proposed to go about it.

Literature Review - An examination of key contributions relating to the area of research in question. The literature review should identify gaps in, or problems with, existing research to justify why further or new research is required

Methodology - a description of the proposed methodology, including details of data collection and analysis. A time schedule showing key activities would be useful

References - any literature cited in the proposal should be listed at the end of the document. Use of the Harvard style of referencing is preferred.

10 tips to make your application more successful

1. Please **do not send us a 'generic' proposal**. We are not interested in receiving a proposal that you have written for admission to another university, unless it fits our research interests.
2. We like **dissertations that are 'academic'**. Our aim is to train researchers who are interested in a career in academia, and are interested in academic publishing. We encourage our PhD students to write their dissertations as a series of publishable papers. If you want to do a PhD to enter into a business role, you should probably consider a DBA instead, which has a more practical aspect to it. You can find more about the Henley DBA [here](#)
3. Your proposal must demonstrate that you have **a good understanding of the subject that you propose to research**. This means that you should have read (and cited) various core academic contributions to the relevant fields.



4. The International Business and Strategy unit combines a **strong theoretical focus with sound empirical analysis**. Demonstrating that you have a good grasp on conceptual/theoretical issues and empirical methods is fundamental to us taking your application seriously. We are expecting to see that you have read most of the core contributions to international business, and that you are familiar with the theoretical traditions of the field.
5. **Examine the publications and citations of our staff**, both current and past, and try and link your research proposal to our current or past research publications. At the very minimum, it will improve the reception your proposal receives if you show that you are familiar with the themes in which our staff have worked on, both presently and in the past.
6. Try and **identify a potential supervisor** by examining the published research of our staff. This will greatly enhance the possibility of your application being accepted - if your proposal fits the research interests of a specific potential supervisor. This means demonstrating a familiarity with their research. You may wish to send your proposal to potential supervisors for comments before applying formally. If there is nobody in our unit who has worked on a similar topic as your research proposal, we will probably reject your application. We have limited supervision capacity, and we only accept students who work on subjects of interest to us.
7. We are interested in seeing your **ability to be analytical and critical** in your analysis of the literature. This means that we are interested in **students who disagree with us**, as well as those who agree with our past work. We like students who extend our own work, even if it takes it in a different direction.
8. Please ensure that your **proposal is well-written**, and without typos. Do not waste your time with complex colour graphics. We are mainly interested in your ability to communicate well, and to write in a clear and logical way.
9. Always consider where you will be able to get the **data for your proposed thesis**. Demonstrating familiarity with publicly available data sets, and secondary data sources is always impressive. If you have access to firms, private datasets or archives that will facilitate your research, please indicate this in your proposal.
10. We take **both an economics and a management perspective**. This means that your proposal should ideally have a section that provides 'managerial implications' or 'policy implications' of your proposed dissertation.

We hope that you find this information useful, please get in touch if you require further information at phd.ibs@henley.ac.uk.