

What should be in a PhD Research Proposal

by

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ABSTRACT

The research proposal should have an abstract. In the abstract, briefly review the problem and how you intend to solve it. The abstract should be between 100 and 200 words.

Key words: provide key words

JEL categories: <These are economic literature research areas, e.g., Q54, Q23, P28>

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Provide a table of contents and, if applicable, tables of tables and figures.

CONTENT

A PhD research proposal should include a number of different sections. It should be at least 25 pages and no more than 40. The writing style should follow that given in the document “Standards and Template for Research Papers”, which is available from www.vkooten.net under ‘Grad Students’. The following should be included in the research proposal, although the order might vary from one proposal to another.

1. Introduction (4-6 pages)

Begin by discussing the broad problem or set of problems that you wish to address. The broad problem might be income volatility and how governments have over the years attempted to

reduce farmers' exposure to risk and support farm incomes. Then consider how policies, such as crop insurance have failed and why. Alternatively, you might consider the contribution of fossil fuels to climate change. In either case, you want to elaborate on the broader issue and then focus on the actual problem that you wish to address in your dissertation.

The actual problem might, in the case of agriculture, be to examine the prospects of index-based insurance as a means for reducing problems of adverse selection and moral hazard, and other problems, in current programs. With respect to fossil fuels, you might wish to focus on solar energy as a potential solution.

Whatever it is that you want to focus on, it is imperative that you state the problem or problems that you will specifically address in the dissertation. This is key! Sometimes the problem you wish to address is related to a specific methodology, and, if it is, be sure to state that you are addressing this particular aspect.

2. Literature Review (8-10 pages)

The literature review is also crucial and it should be a critical review. You must demonstrate that you are familiar with the literature and you should not leave any stones unturned in reviewing the literature. If you do not have 25 or more references, then you have not done your job. You must also point out what contribution you plan to make to the literature.

3. Methods (5-10 pages)

Following on your intended contribution, you need to describe the approach you will use. This requires that you identify the models and procedures that you intend to use. If you are using econometric methods, then you must state the regression model and the estimation procedure. If you are using a mathematical programming approach, write the objective function and constraints. If the model can be solved analytically, provide the solution. If more than one model

is to be used, describe all of them. If you are using calibration methods, describe how you will do this. The reader needs to know what you intend to do.

4. Data (5-6 pages)

Describe the data needed and where it comes from. Provide summaries and graphs of the data. If you have not yet collected data, then you do not know if the data are available; if you know the data are available, then you can provide the reader with information about the data.

5. Outline and time line (3-4 pages)

Finally, your proposal should include an outline of the dissertation and an expected time frame for completing the research. Indeed, if you have a proper proposal, it is only a matter of conducting the remaining research and writing it up.