

Kingston University London

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

How to apply for a PhD in Psychology

Guidance notes for enquirers

The Psychology team at Kingston University can offer expert PhD supervision across the range of sub-disciplines that comprise contemporary Psychology. Our areas of strength include developmental, cognitive, social, health, biological and abnormal psychology. We may also be able to offer supervision in collaboration with other schools in the Faculty of Arts and Social Science, or with other faculties in the university.

These informal guidelines are intended to help you submit a proposal to study for a PhD in Psychology. We appreciate that drawing up a research proposal may not be easy, since you may not have obtained much experience of research in your specific area of interest. The proposal will obviously be a preliminary statement of the research topic and will almost certainly undergo subsequent modification. However, it must provide sufficient information for us to decide whether we have the specialist expertise to supervise the topic, and the necessary facilities and resources to support the research.

In brief, what we are looking for in your proposal is evidence that:

1. You have a clear research question in mind;
2. You have acquired a suitable grounding in the relevant literature that informs the research topic; and
3. You have considered the particular methodology (or methodologies) that will be required to address your research question.

Your proposal should convey your enthusiasm for the topic and your confidence in your ability to complete it. Your proposal should show evidence of reading and thought beyond final-year undergraduate level. If you are invited to an interview, the proposal is likely to form the basis of our discussion; it is important, therefore to take the time to prepare it as thoroughly as possible. There are a number of useful guides to doctoral research and thesis writing which you may wish to consult before writing your proposal, and the first (below) is specifically useful for research in psychology:

- Leong, F.T.L. & Austin, J.T. (2006). *The psychology research handbook*. (2nd ed.). London: Sage
- Phillips, E.M. & Pugh, D.S. (2000). *How to get a PhD: A handbook for students and their supervisors*. Open University Press
- Cryer, P. (2000). *The research student's guide to success*. Open University Press

Structure and content of the proposal

Your proposal should be word-processed, double-spaced and at least 2-3 sides of A4 paper in length. It should comprise the following elements:

1. The research question and its context

You should open with a clear statement of the aims of the research project. You should identify a research question, and locate the project in relation to current research in psychology. The choice of topic is obviously very important; whatever area you choose, try to be as specific as possible, and avoid the temptation to be over-ambitious and cover too much ground. If you have more than one idea in mind then describe each of them. You must justify the significance of the research question, and demonstrate how your project would contribute to current knowledge in the area. The literature review that you present to support your line of research should be based around articles in peer-reviewed academic journals.

2. The research methodology and data analyses

You must describe how you intend to address the research question: what kinds of study need to be conducted - experiments, surveys, interviews, or a combination of these? What kind of data will be produced and how will they be analysed? Do you need special equipment or facilities? Do you need access to particular kinds of population, e.g. schoolchildren, or people with certain kinds of mental health problem? If your project depends upon the goodwill or active support of some organisation outside of the University with which we have no current relationship, then describe it in some detail and propose how a suitable collaboration might be secured. Highlight any ethical concerns that might arise from the project.

3. The research skills necessary to complete the project

Provide an assessment of your particular research training/skills development to date, and describe the kinds of additional training that that you may need if you enrol as a research student pursuing your proposed topic. Will you need to learn how to use any special equipment or software? Do you need to be trained in interviewing techniques? Most students with a BPS-accredited bachelor's degree in Psychology will have acquired extensive experience of statistical methods for the analysis of research data, but it is not always easy for us to estimate the extent to which students from other disciplines are competent in data analysis. Some students may also have acquired specific skills from conducting a final-year undergraduate research project that is relevant to their research proposal, or from a related master's degree. Such experience - or lack of it - should be described; where there are gaps, we can very often provide appropriate, advanced training to meet the requirements of the project.

Further Information

We particularly recommend that you check the staff profile pages to confirm that we have a suitable supervisor with specialist knowledge in your area of interest. You can obtain further information from our website: <http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/research/psychology/staff/>

For any further information or to submit a proposal, please contact:

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