



# International University of Interfaith Morality

## Proposal

Proposal writing is important to your pursuit of a graduate degree. The proposal is, in effect, an intellectual scholastic (not legal) contract between you and your committee. It specifies what you will do, how you will do it, and how you will interpret the results. In specifying what will be done it also gives criteria for determining whether it is done. In approving the proposal, your committee gives their best judgment that the approach to the research is reasonable and likely to yield the anticipated results. They are implicitly agreeing that they will accept the result as adequate for the purpose of granting a degree.

The objective in writing a proposal is to describe what you will do, why it should be done, how you will do it and what you expect will result. Being clear about these things from the beginning will help you complete your thesis in a timely fashion. A vague, weak or fuzzy proposal can lead to a long, painful, and often unsuccessful thesis writing exercise. A clean, well thought-out, proposal forms the backbone for the thesis itself.

A good thesis proposal hinges on a good idea. Once you have a good idea, you can draft the proposal in an evening. Getting a good idea hinges on familiarity with the topic. This assumes a longer preparatory period of reading, observation, discussion, and incubation. Read everything that you can in your area of interest. Figure out what are the important and missing parts of our understanding. Figure out how to build/discover those pieces. Live and breathe the topic. Talk about it with anyone who is interested. Then just write the important parts as the proposal. Filling in the things that we do not know and that will help us know more: that is what research is all about.

Proposals help you estimate the size of a project. Don't make the project too big. These days, sixty double spaced pages, with figures, tables and bibliography, would be a long paper. Your proposal will be shorter, perhaps five pages and certainly no more than fifteen pages. The merit of the proposal counts, not the weight. Shoot for five pithy pages that indicate to a relatively well-informed audience that you know the topic and how its logic hangs together, rather than fifteen or twenty pages that indicate that you have read a lot of things but not yet boiled it down to a set of prioritized linked questions.

In the abstract all proposals are very similar. They need to show a reasonably informed reader why a particular topic is important to address and how you will do it. To that end, a proposal needs to show how your work fits into what is already known about the topic and what new contribution your work will make. Specify the question that your research will answer, establish why it is a significant question, show how you are going to answer the question, and indicate what you expect we will learn. The proposal should situate the work in the literature, it should show why this is an (if not the most) important question to answer in the field, and convince your committee (the skeptical readers that they are) that your approach will in fact result in an answer to the question.

It is now your time to write your proposal. The following outline depicts one of widely-used ones.

### A Basic Proposal Outline:

#### Introduction

- Topic area

- Research question

- Significance to knowledge

#### Literature review

- Previous research

  - Others & yours

- Interlocking findings and unanswered questions

- Your preliminary work on the topic

- The remaining questions and inter-locking logic

- Reprise of your research question(s) in this context

#### Methodology

- Approach

- Data needs

- Analytic techniques

- Plan for interpreting results

#### Expected results

#### Bibliography (or References)