

The Department of History, NUS

A guide to the History HT Proposal

(Updated June 2022)

How do you make a start on your HT proposal (and topic)?

- Read widely on fields and topics that interest you.
 - What do I already know about this topic?
 - What interests me about this topic?
 - Why is this topic important to people other than me?
- Talk with peers and faculty
- Look at some recent HTs to get a sense of the scope of the topic. Browse journals, online discussion forums, and get a sense of topics which are of particular interest in scholarly circles.
- A good topic should interest you! You will be researching and writing about it for a good amount of time, so find a topic that fascinates you.
- A good topic is doable. This means you have access to materials and the scope is narrow enough.
- A good topic contains a question (or questions). This guiding question will help as you begin your research and writing. Ask yourself: what is the main question I am trying to answer?

As your work progresses you might ask yourself: What's my main argument? How has it changed since I began my project? What evidence have I found to support my argument? What questions do my sources not answer?

What makes a good HT proposal?

Your proposal lays the groundwork for the research you are planning to do. To write the proposal you need to think through the project from beginning to end. Your proposal should be 2-3 pages long. Provide a title and also the name of your potential advisor (supervisor).

The following is a *suggested* format:

Introduction: Give some general background to the topic. Why is this topic important? (Think of moving from the general to the specific and of giving a 'map' of what is ahead for your reader). Why are you interested in this topic?

Research problem: what is the problem (question, hypothesis) to be tested? What are your aims and objectives? (See *The Craft of Research* for a good guide on how to move beyond asking a simple question to addressing a problem through your research).

An overview of relevant literature: While there is a temptation to just list works, it is better if you can explain (briefly) why these studies are important to your research. It also allows you to mention what further research you think is needed in this area (ie. your work!). What gap are you addressing with your research?

A brief description of the research procedure and methodology: For example, will you use a conceptual framework for your analysis? What sources or evidence will you draw on? Do you have a tentative table of contents (an organizational framework)?

A bibliography: The purpose is to give your advisor an indication of the quality and range of sources, primary and secondary, available for your research topic. Your advisor might also be able to suggest additional sources that you may have overlooked. This list might be a 'work in progress' but it is good to provide an indication on the types of materials you've already identified.

This guide is prepared with reference to:

Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb. Et.al. *The Craft of Research*. Fourth Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016)

"Honors Theses" The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/honors-theses/>

"Writing a Thesis Proposal: Independent Learning Resources" Learning Centre, The University of Sydney. <https://www.sydney.edu.au/content/dam/students/documents/learning-resources/learning-centre/writing-a-thesis-proposal.pdf>