

GUIDELINES FOR THE DOCTORAL PROPOSAL FOR A PHD BY PUBLICATION IN THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

1. Title of dissertation

The title of the dissertation must be concise but informative.

2. Introduction and rationale

In this section, a background to the proposed study is given, i.e., an explanation of why the study is being undertaken. Reference is usually made to existing knowledge that has already been generated in relation to the field of investigation and the deficiencies in respect of existing research are pointed out.

3. Problem statement and research question(s)

Doctoral study preferably concerns research undertaken with the intention of solving an existing and clearly formulated problem. The precise nature of the problem should be clearly formulated, specifically taking into account the meaning of the central concepts posed in its problem statement. The problem statement should be stated in not more than a single paragraph and should formulate the focal point of the dissertation concisely, intelligibly and clearly. Significantly, the problem statement makes clear what the original contribution of the study will be.

4. Theoretical points of departure

The theoretical framework(s) within which the research will be undertaken are stated and justified.

5. Research design and methods

Candidates must clearly state what approach(es) and methods they intend using to address and attempt to solve the proposed problem. They should indicate their familiarity with possible controversies or limitations that exist in their field of research regarding the methods in question and/or potential problems and how they are planning to approach these. This should include critical reflection on the possible use of AI. In the case of empirical research, detail must be provided of the way in which key concepts will be operationalised and the manner in which data will be collected and analysed, possibly with examples of fieldwork, questionnaires or references to standard or newly developed measuring instruments. Candidates employing practice-based methodologies should justify their intended use of this method.

If the study is of an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary nature, this must be clearly stated. Candidates should then give an account of the questions that methodologically problematise such an undertaking and indicate how such challenges can be overcome.

6. Integration of scholarly articles into dissertation and timeframe

Candidates must give an explanation of the different phases through which the research will pass and how these phases are linked logically and systematically. More specifically, the candidate must indicate:

- the rationale (academic merit) for including the articles as a part of the dissertation;
- how the envisaged articles belong within the research problem and relate to the research question(s) and focus of the dissertation;

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- the envisaged content of each article and statement of contribution (i.e., co-authorship) for each article; and
- how the articles will be integrated in the overall structure and/or chapter division of the dissertation to form a coherent whole.

Candidates must also indicate the deadlines for the completion of each of the identified phases of the research. These deadlines should clearly indicate when the research is likely to be completed. Supervisors and candidates should, as far as possible, use this time schedule to monitor progress.

7. Budget

The aim of this section is to ensure that the candidate takes into account the potential financial implications of the study and the possible impact thereof on the feasibility of the project. It is thus necessary that the candidate indicates whether extraordinary research expenses are expected and how they intend to cover such costs. The budget should only include costs relating to the research project (excluding tuition fees and personal living costs, etc.). The candidate is personally responsible for the financing of their study.

8. Ethical considerations

This section details the ethical challenges associated with the research design and methods selected for the study. Ethical clearance must be approved via the [online ethical clearance application system](#) prior to the commencement of data collection or as soon as possible after the research proposal has been approved. Ethical clearance cannot be approved retrospectively, i.e., after the research has been conducted.

Where ethical clearance is required, a mere description of the ethical clearance process in the research proposal will not suffice. Candidates should clearly indicate the level of risk of the proposed study and discuss any ethical considerations and how they might mitigate these.

Where ethical clearance is not required, candidates should state so in a single sentence with reference to the research design and methods selected for the study. The [provisional ethics exemption form](#) (once the research proposal has been approved by Senate) and [ethics exemption declaration](#) (once the dissertation is ready for examination) are to be completed for those studies that are exempt from ethical clearance.

9. Research integrity and appropriate use of AI tools

All PhD students must include a section in their research proposal that addresses research integrity in relation to the use of AI tools. This section should explicitly outline how AI is intended to be used (if at all) in the research process, from data collection and analysis to writing and dissemination. Students are expected to develop clear and transparent strategies in consultation with their supervisors to ensure that AI is used appropriately and supports, rather than compromises, academic integrity and ethical standards.

Submissions should be between 3 000 and 4 500 words,
excluding bibliography and addenda.

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
HDRC Supporting Documentation
Updated January 2026