How to apply for a PhD in and Languages and Linguistics

Guidance notes for enquirers
The English Language and Linguistics teaching team at Kingston University welcomes applications from research students in any field that falls within the English language and linguistics remit (Link to English Language and Linguistics research areas). New research students can enrol at two points in the year: March and October.

Admission criteria
Applicants should have obtained a good result (merit or distinction, or the equivalent) in an MA programme, with a completed dissertation or research project in English language or linguistics. Consideration may be given to applicants with other kinds of qualifications on an individual basis. International students are also required to have the IELTS 7 in English language as evidence of their proficiency in the language. Applicants may also be required to submit a sample of their written work (MA Dissertation, for example) and be interviewed (either face to face or via the telephone) as part of the assessment.

Application process
We are delighted you are considering a PhD course at Kingston. Please make your application here using these proposal guidelines below.

Guidance notes for writing a research proposal
The following guidelines are intended to help you submit a proposal to study for a PhD in English language and linguistics at Kingston University. We appreciate that drawing up a proposal is not easy at this stage. What we are looking for is evidence that you have reflected on this topic, have knowledge of the relevant literature and considered the approach that you will be taking, for example, whether you will be collecting some form of empirical data, analysing texts, or a combination of these methods. This means that your proposal needs to be well-written, with a coherent plan based on knowledge of the area, and this requires careful preparation.

The proposal will obviously be a preliminary statement of the research and will almost certainly undergo subsequent modification. Its purpose is to enable us to decide whether we have the specialist expertise to supervise the topic, to evaluate its academic viability and importance and to assess your commitment and enthusiasm. If you are invited to an interview, the proposal will 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. These include:

**Thesis or Dissertation.** Basingstoke, Hamps: Palgrave Macmillan


**Structure and Content**

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

- **Indicative title** (should be a statement rather than a question)
- **Aim and focus:** Research question or hypothesis – problematizing the statement, identifying underlying concepts so that the area of study can be interrogated, not just described. There can be sub-questions in a hierarchy helping ask the question.
- **Context:** Establishes students’ own context that of the research, timing, key issues, and gap in the knowledge the work will fit. What are the concepts (ideas) that the research will deal with?
- **Theoretical perspectives:** Theories and interpretations, arguments in the field into which the work fits. Includes the key theories and theorists in a dialogue with the student’s own ideas and plans.
- **Methodology:** Choices of research approach based on beliefs about how the question can be asked – theory building (inductive) or theory testing (deductive) or both. The active way(s) that enable the student to question the area or field and to ask, observe, explore, experiment and take part using interviews, focus groups, experiments, tracked processes, observation schedules and questionnaires.
- **Design of the study:** How are you going to undertake the research? Why, in what roles, using which sample or experiment? Where, when, how many and why? Boundaries – what’s not studied and why?
- **Ethics:** Considerations about risk, harm, confidentiality, invasiveness, participant consent.
- **Shape of the proposal:** A plan of what each chapter could focus on – suggest themes and developments.
- **References** to works cited and other relevant literature you have consulted (using the Harvard system of referencing

**Source:** Adapted form Whisker, G. (2012) *The good supervisor,* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
To consider:

- Give an indicative plan for the proposed research, for example, a chapter-by-chapter breakdown of the proposed plan of study. (This is likely to change and is not prescriptive.) This plan should take into account the timeframe within which the research degree should be completed (three or four years’ of full-time study, or six years part-time).
- Briefly explain how your previous study, or your academic or professional background has prepared you to undertake the proposed research.

The choice of topic is obviously very important. English language and linguistics covers a wide range of subject matter and approaches. Whatever area you choose, try and be as specific as possible and avoid the temptation to be over-ambitious.

It is important that the rationale for the research should demonstrate originality with regard to existing work in the field. This means that the proposal should engage in a critical analysis of the relevant literature i.e. what does this study aim to achieve? Does it investigate an area that has either not been examined before, or else only partially so? Is it challenging existing interpretations of the topic, or demonstrating that a different theoretical perspective can lead to new insights? The methodology will vary according to the nature of the project. Say whether you are using informants, questionnaires and interviews, or undertaking some kind of text analysis or both, for example, so a clear description of the qualitative and/or quantitative approaches are clearly given.

References should show a sound bibliographical knowledge of the topic, and be presented alphabetically by the authors’ surname using the Harvard referencing system.

A PhD thesis is an original piece of research intended to add to the existing body of knowledge in the field. At this early stage you will only be able to suggest ways in which your work will achieve this, but your proposal should convey your enthusiasm for the topic and confidence in your ability to complete it.