

Zoology PhD Proposal Rubric

The Proposal Meeting should be a collegial discussion among the members of the supervisory committee and the student; its primary intent is to create an opportunity for the student's research plans to be improved by a discussion among colleagues.

However, the Proposal Meeting is also the venue for the committee to evaluate whether the student's research plan is sufficient and feasible for a PhD. PhD proposals must be approved by the student's supervisory committee prior to the student's comprehensive exam.

At the end of the Proposal Meeting, the supervisory committee should decide, in camera, whether the proposal is approved or whether further revisions are required. The possible outcomes are:

1. **No revisions required.** The student can proceed to schedule their comprehensive exam.
2. **Minor revisions required.** The committee should provide the student with a written list of comments that need to be addressed before the proposal can be accepted. The committee should determine whether revisions should be assessed by the supervisor or the committee as a whole, but no further Proposal Meeting is required. Revisions must be accepted before the student may proceed to the comprehensive exam.
3. **Major revisions required.** A rewritten proposal and a new proposal appraisal meeting will be required prior to proceeding to the comprehensive exam. The committee should provide the student with a written list of comments that need to be addressed before the proposal can be accepted. The proposal should be re-written to resolve the issues raised by the committee. The committee may also recommend that the student write a brief summary of changes in the style of a "responses to reviewers". Students may be advised to meet individually with committee members. The revised proposal should be submitted to the committee within three months of the first Proposal Meeting.
In the very rare occasions that the proposal remains insufficient following the second meeting, the Zoology graduate advisors must be notified for a discussion of the best way forward.

The following rubric is intended to guide the assessment of PhD Proposals.

Component	<u>No revisions required</u>	<u>Minor revisions required</u>	<u>Major revisions required</u>
Literature review	Background is comprehensive, demonstrating a strong understanding of the area and the relevant literature	Background provides most of the information required to understand the proposed research and approaches; but some needed details are omitted; includes useful references but has some gaps or is missing some key papers	Any of: Background does not provide adequate depth; key details are omitted; irrelevant information is emphasized; important factual errors are present; key concepts are misapplied or references are inappropriate
Rationale and significance	Clear and compelling explanation of the need of the project and its significance	Explanation of the need for the project and/or significance needs minor improvement	Any of: Need of the project for the field is not sufficiently explained; significance of the research for further study and/or applications is not well described
Logic of the research aims and scope of the proposal	Research aims align clearly with the background material; aims represent creative approaches to tackle important problems; aims are well connected & have a good balance between ambition and feasibility	The alignment between the research gaps identified in the background and the research aims is not always clear	Any of: The research aims do not address the identified research gaps; scope is inappropriate for a PhD; aims are not feasible

Methodology	Proposed approaches will provide logical and rigorous answers to the research questions; methods are well-described; appropriate resources are available	Some of the proposed methodology not appropriate for the research aim; important aspects of methods are not described; replication or controls are insufficiently described; availability of resources unclear	Proposed approaches not well connected to research aims (e.g., for hypothesis-driven research, proposed approaches are not a logical or rigorous test of the hypothesis); serious errors in the research plan (e.g., lack of replication, insufficient controls, etc.); feasibility of proposed approaches is not well supported
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The committee should also assess and comment on the quality of the writing in the proposal. Poor writing alone is not sufficient reason to require major revisions and a new proposal meeting (although this may occur if the writing obscures the logic of the proposal). However, if the evaluation of the written proposal suggests that the student has challenges in writing, this should be viewed as an opportunity for the committee to recommend (or require) that the student work to develop their writing skills, for example by taking a writing course or attending writing workshops.