

# Developing and refining your Research Proposal

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# Do you need a research proposal?



STEM –  
Predefined  
research  
areas more  
common



ARTS &  
HUMANITIES  
– Research  
proposals  
more  
common



SOCIAL  
SCIENCE –  
Research  
proposals  
more  
common



# In this session we will consider ...

1. the purpose of a research proposal
2. what makes a good research proposal
3. the components of a research proposal

Today's session:

- General principles of a research proposal
- Check specifics with your department / potential supervisor



# The purpose of a research proposal is ...

- to act as your starting point or foundation
- to force you to explain your research in a concise but formal way
- to enable supervisors to see what you are capable of on many levels
- to highlight research problems and strengths at an early stage



# The purpose of a research proposal is ...

- to help you develop your skills in thinking about and designing a research study
- to give you practice at locating scholarship related to your topic
- to help you identify the logical steps that you must be take to accomplish your research goals



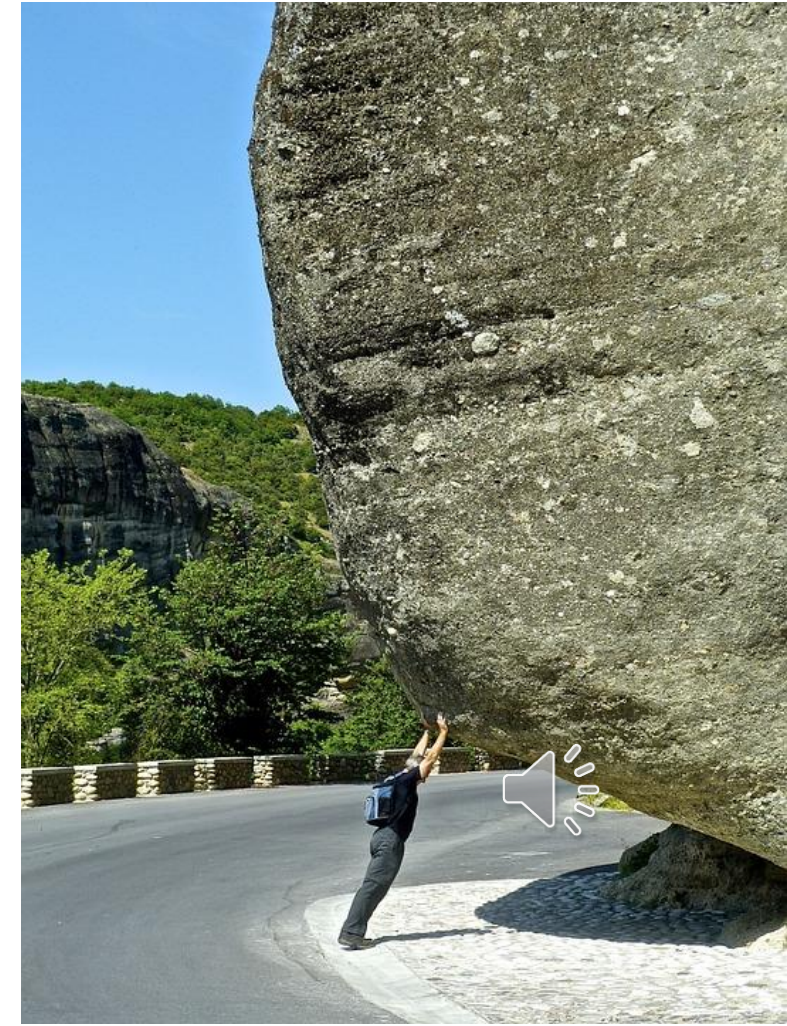
# A good research proposal ...

- demonstrates that your research has not been done before.
- enables the reader to understand your questions and objectives
- a good knowledge of the body of literature and the wider context
- Shows an awareness of methodologies, theories and conflicting ideas



# What a research proposal is NOT

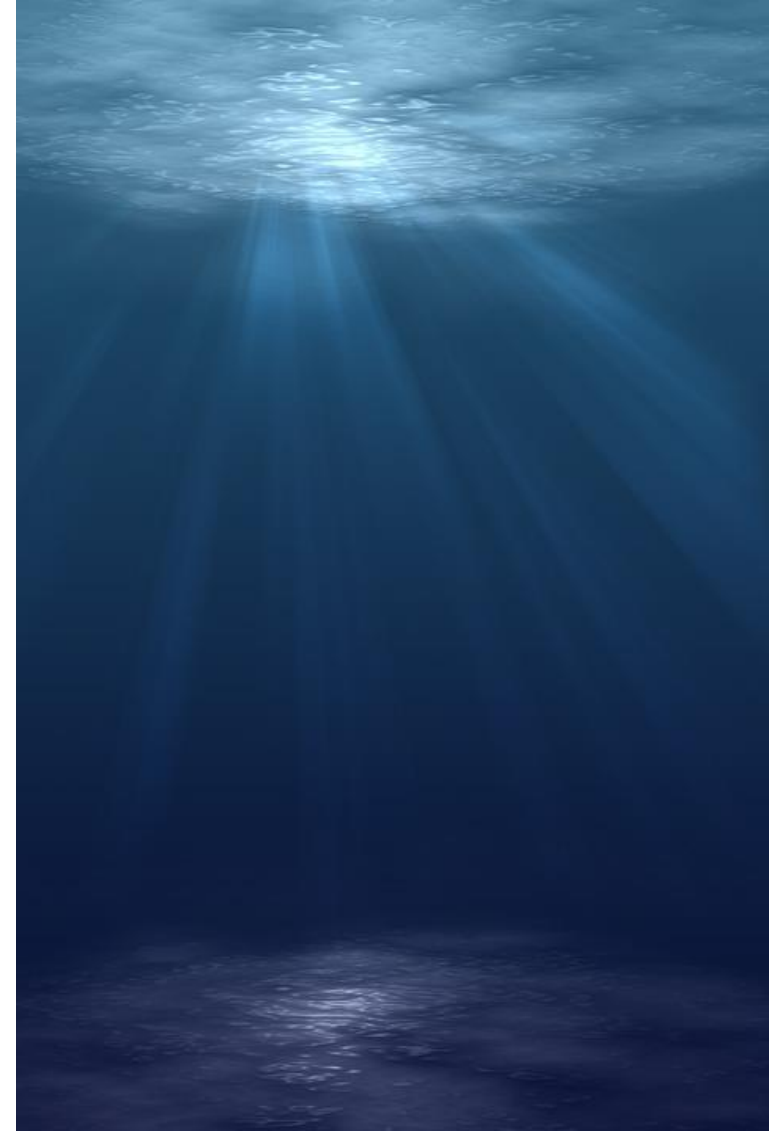
- It is NOT a thesis
- It is NOT a full literature review
- It is NOT a 'tablet of stone' or an immovable object



# Your research proposal allows you to clarify ...

- What are you looking for?
- What do you seek to prove / investigate?
- What will you consider the relationship between?
- What will you contribute to?
- What will you change?
- What difference will your research make?
- Why does it 'matter'?

Your personal relationship to your research



# A research proposal may include...

- a provisional title
- a statement of aim
- a statement of rationale
- a description of the methodological approach and methods used in the research
- a statement of ethical issues
- an indicative bibliography.



# Bibliography

- NOT comprehensive (that's for the Literature Review)
- Relevant to the research proposal
- Fully reference any source (literary and non-literary) that you refer to in your research proposal



# Ideas to help your submission

- Provide a clear project title
- Structure your text – if allowed use section headings
- Present the information in short paragraphs rather than a solid block of text
- Write short sentences
- If allowed, provide images/charts/diagrams to help break up the text



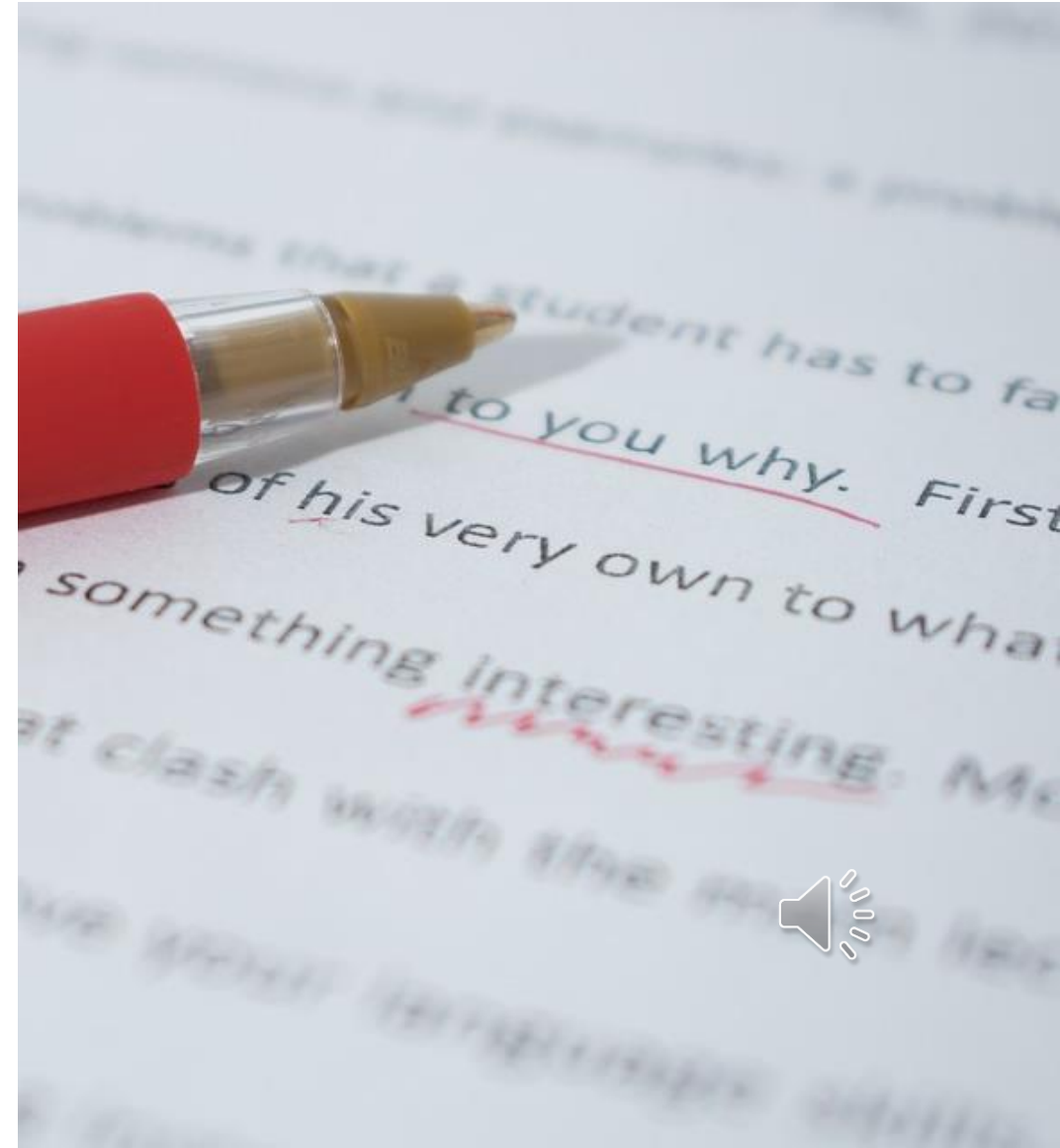
# Ideas to help your submission

- Identify prospective supervisors and discuss your idea with them
- Avoid blanket general e-mails to several prospective supervisors
- Allow plenty of time – a rushed proposal will show
- Get feedback from your prospective supervisor and be prepared to take their comments on board
- If applying to an external funding agency, remember that the reviewer may not be an expert in your area of research
- Stick to the guidelines and remember the deadline



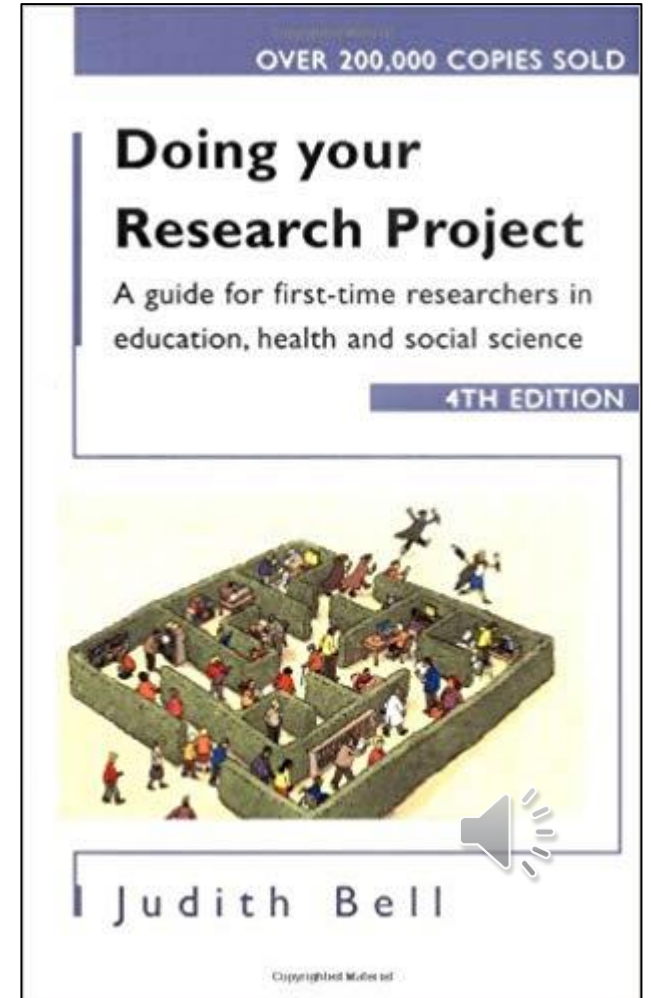
# Common mistakes to avoid

- Failure to be concise
- Failure to cite landmark/seminal works
- Failure to delimit the boundaries of your research
- Failure to develop a coherent and persuasive argument
- Failure to proofread submission



# Further reading

- **Bell, J. (2001) (4<sup>th</sup> ed.) *Doing Your Research Project*. Buckingham: OU Press.**
- Grix, J. (2001) *Demystifying Postgraduate Research: from MA to PhD*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press.
- Matthews, B., Ross, L. (2010) *Research Methods: a practical guide for the social sciences*. Harlow: Longman.
- Walliman, N. (2011) *Research Methods: the basics*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Wisker, G. (2001) *The Postgraduate Research Handbook*. London: Palgrave.



# Good Luck



# Thank you:

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This presentation builds on work by Simon Rees, Niall Oddy and Christine Bohlander