



Identifying a PhD supervisor

Choosing to undertake graduate research is a big decision and it is extremely important that you identify a research project that really excites you. Identifying the right supervisor is critical as this relationship provides you with invaluable support and guidance from a leading academic in your field.

How to identify a suitable supervisor?

- Thoroughly research your options on UCL departmental websites and in the UCL online Graduate Prospectus: www.ucl.ac.uk/gradprospectus
- Make contact with either the specific academic you are interested in working with, or the appropriate Department Graduate Tutor (listed either on the department website or next to the programme entry in the Graduate Prospectus), to explore research opportunities in more depth.

This process helps define your interests and aspirations, contributes to making your application successful, and also serves to ensure the identification of the best possible supervisor for your needs.

How to make a research enquiry

Academic members of staff are extremely busy people and receive a lot of research enquiries. In a recent survey 67% of staff said they receive research enquiries that do not relate to their interests. It is extremely important to research supervisor's interests thoroughly before you contact them. If they do not think your enquiry is related to their research they may not have time to respond to you.

Here are some tips for contacting graduate tutors or academic staff to explore research opportunities:

- Take time over your email and make sure you highlight your strengths clearly
- Make sure your English is as good as possible
- Do not use the same email template to contact different academics. Enquiries should be tailored to the academic's area of interest and refer to their current work

In most cases you should include the following information:

- Funding status (secured funding, self-funded, will apply for a scholarship, applying for a specific advertised position etc).
- Whether you are a UK, overseas or EU student.
- Whether you want to conduct your research full time or part time.

Academics in different areas will expect different things. Generally speaking:

- Supervisors in areas where research is more usually conducted in research teams, normally **science, engineering or medicine**, will want to see evidence that you will fit well in the research team. They will want to see a CV demonstrating your interest and experience in their area of specialisation, as well as a brief note on why you are interested in joining their research team in particular.
- Supervisors in areas where research is usually conducted on an individual basis, normally **humanities and social sciences**, will usually expect to see a well thought-through Proposal

for the research that you want to conduct. This research will have to be closely related to research recently conducted by the supervisor. Please see further guidance below.

If you are unsure about whether a research proposal is necessary check with the graduate tutor in the department, division, research group or institute you are interested in. These can be found on the academic unit's website or in UCL's online Graduate Prospectus: www.ucl.ac.uk/gradprospectus

Guidance on how to write a research proposal (if applicable – see previous section)

The format for a research proposal varies between different disciplines, but all good proposals must be both informative and persuasive. You need to clearly describe the topic, its aims and objectives, and its methodology.

This should be done as concisely as possible and in the first instance should usually amount to around 500 words. Your initial proposal - prior to contacting an academic - should certainly not exceed 3,000 words. If a prospective supervisor is interested in your proposal the two of you will usually refine and develop it together to produce a final research proposal.

A good proposal should have the following basic elements, though their order and weighting can of course vary:

- A working title: Make this clear and descriptive
- Some background and rationale
 - Explain the background and issues of your research
 - What are your aims and objectives?
 - What are the parameters? Explain why you have chosen them?
- Clear and defined research question (s).
 - Your question needs to be answerable within a set timeframe
- A description of your theoretical framework and methodological approach.
 - Why is this best suited to your topic?
 - What are the theoretical and research issues related to your research question?
 - What sources / data will you use?
 - What are the activities necessary for the completion of your project?
 - Will you need to collaborate with other researchers or organisations?
 - Are there ethical considerations that need to be considered?
 - How realistic is your project in practical terms?
- An analytic discussion of the scholarly research to date on your topic.
 - What is the current state of your field?
 - Acknowledge the main contributors in this field
 - In what ways will your research create valuable and useful knowledge?
- A brief statement on your particular qualifications.
 - Have your previous degrees given you the necessary knowledge of the field, discipline, and methodologies you require?
 - What research training will you need to undertake?
- Do you hope to publish your research, if so where?

