

Writing up a proposal

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15 Aug 2022

Outline

- Structure of a research proposal
- Additional tips
- How to find topics that are in line with Lincoln's interests

Structure of research proposals

- General requirements
 - 3000 – 5000 words excluding references and appendices
 - The topics are in line with Lincoln's research interests
- Structure
 - Title
 1. Introduction
 2. Literature review
 3. Methodology
 - References
 - Appendices (if any)

Title

This may not be the title of your final thesis but should give a clear indication to supervisors of the area you are interested in exploring

Lincoln (2021)

- A good title
 - invokes the curiosity of a reader;
 - reflects the content of the proposal
 - and thus, helps set the expectations of a reader in terms of content and approach used.

Title

- Make a short list of **the most significant contributions** of your research in terms of **topic, methods and/or findings**.
- Draft a few alternate titles
 - that capture the **key words** related to these contributions and
 - select one that is the **best fit and shortest**.

Title

- Topics

- Borjas, G.J., Freeman, R.B. and Katz, L.F., 1996. [Searching for the Effect of Immigration on the Labor Market](#). *The American Economic Review*, 86(2), pp.246-251.
- Edin, K. and Lein, L., 1997. [Work, welfare, and single mothers' economic survival strategies](#). *American sociological review*, pp.253-266

- Methods

- Doytch, N. and Uctum, M., 2011. [Does the worldwide shift of FDI from manufacturing to services accelerate economic growth? A GMM estimation study](#). *Journal of International Money and Finance*, 30(3), pp.410-427.

- Findings

- Holst, D.R. and Weiss, J., 2004. [ASEAN and China: export rivals or partners in regional growth?](#). *World Economy*, 27(8), pp.1255-1274.
- Jarreau, J. and Poncet, S., 2012. [Export sophistication and economic growth: Evidence from China](#). *Journal of development Economics*, 97(2), pp.281-292.

Introduction

- *[...] should*
 - *set the context of your proposal and explain*
 - *what you will research*
 - *why the research is of value*
 - *how you propose to go about it.*
- *The introduction is your opportunity to demonstrate that your proposed research **has a significant contribution** to existing bodies of literature*

Lincoln (2021)

Introduction – setting the hook

- **Grab attention** of the reader by showing that the topic matters
- Relate **what we know and do not know** about the topic already.
- Foreshadow **the findings**
- Describe the **remainder** of the manuscript.

Reuber and Sharma (2013), pp. 115-116

Grab attention – topic matters

- [Global climate control has recently emerged as an important international issue.](#) However, in China, economic growth and improvements in living standards are leading to higher household energy demand and consumption (Ouyang and Hokao, 2009; Wang et al., 2011, 2012a; Song et al., 2013; Yue et al., 2013). Promoting energy-efficient technology and new energy development is not sufficient to solve the problems of high energy consumption and environmental pollution. However, changing people's energy-consumption behavior can potentially make a great contribution towards solving the problem (Ouyang and Hokao, 2009; Abrahamse et al., 2007; Feng et al., 2010). [Consequently, energy conservation by individuals has become a significant focus for the research worldwide.](#)

Yue, T., Long, R. and Chen, H., 2013. [Factors influencing energy-saving behavior of urban households in Jiangsu Province.](#) *Energy Policy*, 62, pp.665-675.

Grab attention – setting the context

- “Household energy usage in China accounted for about 10% of total energy consumption in 2010 (NBSC, 2012) and about 7% in Jiangsu Province in 2011 (BSJS, 2012). Although these percentages are not larger, comparing with those in developed countries, the lack of energy resources to meet the demand highlights the importance of household energy usage in China, especially in Jiangsu Province which has a high-carbon energy-consumption structure. Urban energy consumption across China accounted for approximately 60% of all usage; however, in Jiangsu Province, it accounted for about 82% (DES, 2011). Urban usage is a representative of end-user energy consumption in modern Chinese society to some extent; consequently, urban residents have a great potential to impact energy consumption.”

Yue, Long and Chen (2013)

What we know and what we do not know

- “Research on household energy use and energy-saving behavior **has found** that several types of factors can influence energy-usage behavior. For example, [...] “
- “Studies have **also found** that group-level feedback and peer education can also lead individuals to modify their behavior even without economic reward [...] “
- “Although these dimensions of influencing factors have been identified in many research studies, **the relationships between them have received little attention** [...].

Yue, Long and Chen (2013)

Foreshadow the findings

- The purpose of this paper is to provide insights into **the factors influencing energy-saving behavior**, the **mechanisms of action** of these factors, the **relationships among them**, and **the possible differences in behavior among the three regions** of Jiangsu Province.
Yue, Long and Chen (2013)
- Need to state out clearly and explicitly **the research question**, provide a short summary of **your aims and objectives** as well as **the expected outcomes**

The remainder

- In Section 2, a conceptual framework of behavioral theories and hypotheses are presented. Section 3 presents the survey design, experimental procedures, and sampling strategy. In Section 4, results of the empirical analysis are presented and discussed. Finally, in Section 5, conclusions are summarized and policy implications are discussed

Yue, Long and Chen (2013)

Literature review

- *A thorough examination of **key contributions** in research sources relating to the area of research in question.*
- *This must be **relevant and up to date***
- *If you are basing this on work that you may have done previously (e.g. at Masters level) you **should ensure that you have updated it with the latest developments in the literature since you wrote it.***
- *It is through the literature review that you lay the foundations for your research questions, by **critically evaluating what has already been done, how it could be improved, where the gaps are, or what the new frontiers are that your research will address.***

Lincoln (2021)

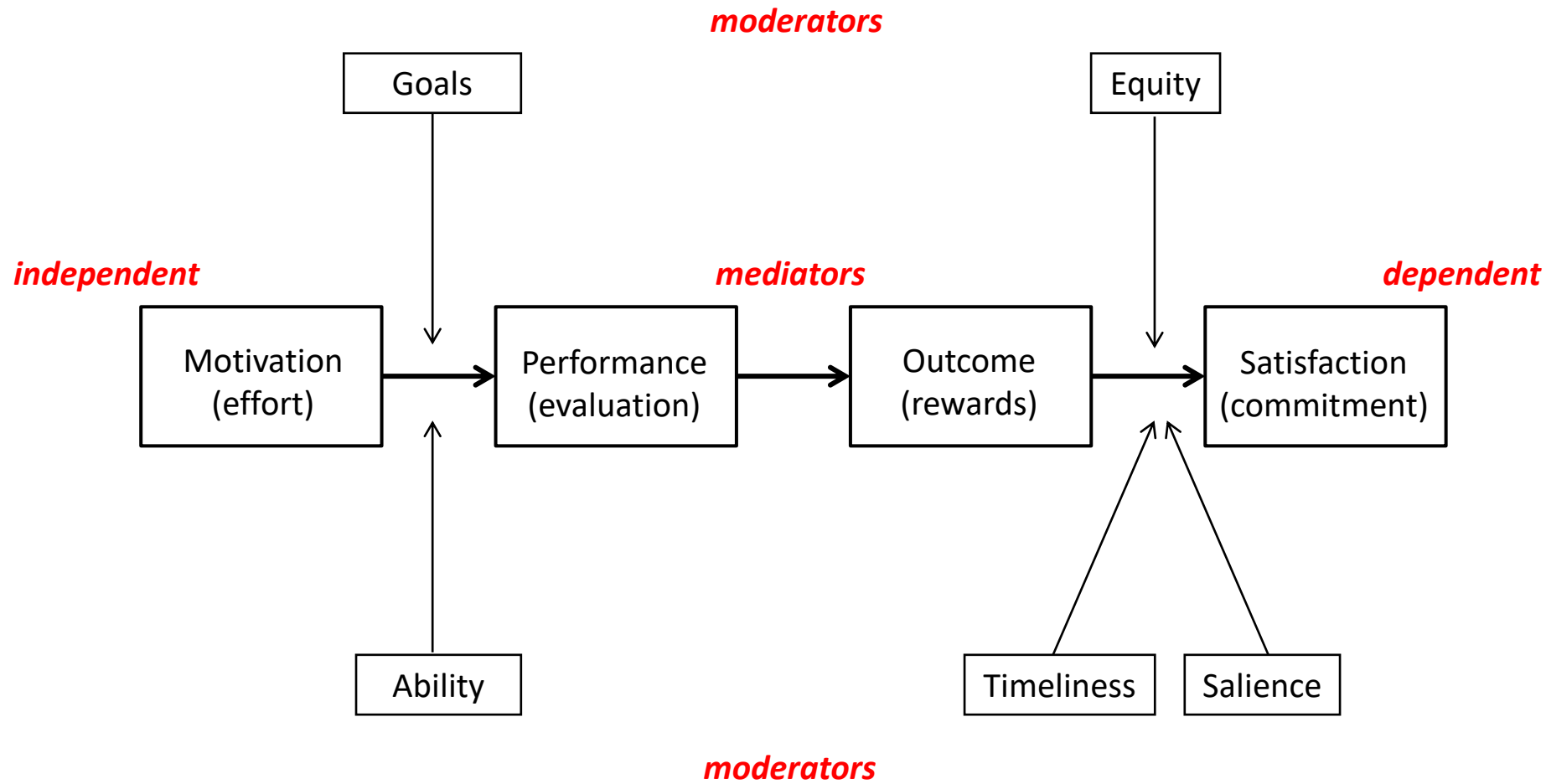
Literature review

- Account for about 30% of the proposal
- Evaluation of the existing body of knowledge on the issue
 - In term of theories
 - In term of empirical research
- Should cover
 - Theoretical frameworks
 - Where your research fits in (your contribution)

Literature review

- Suggestion: identify and describe key themes
 - Theme 1, Theme 2, Theme 3, ...
- Then:
 - How are the identified themes connected? – ‘why’ are two or more themes linked?
- Finally:
 - Summing up to show how your proposal is grounded in this literature.

Theoretical frameworks



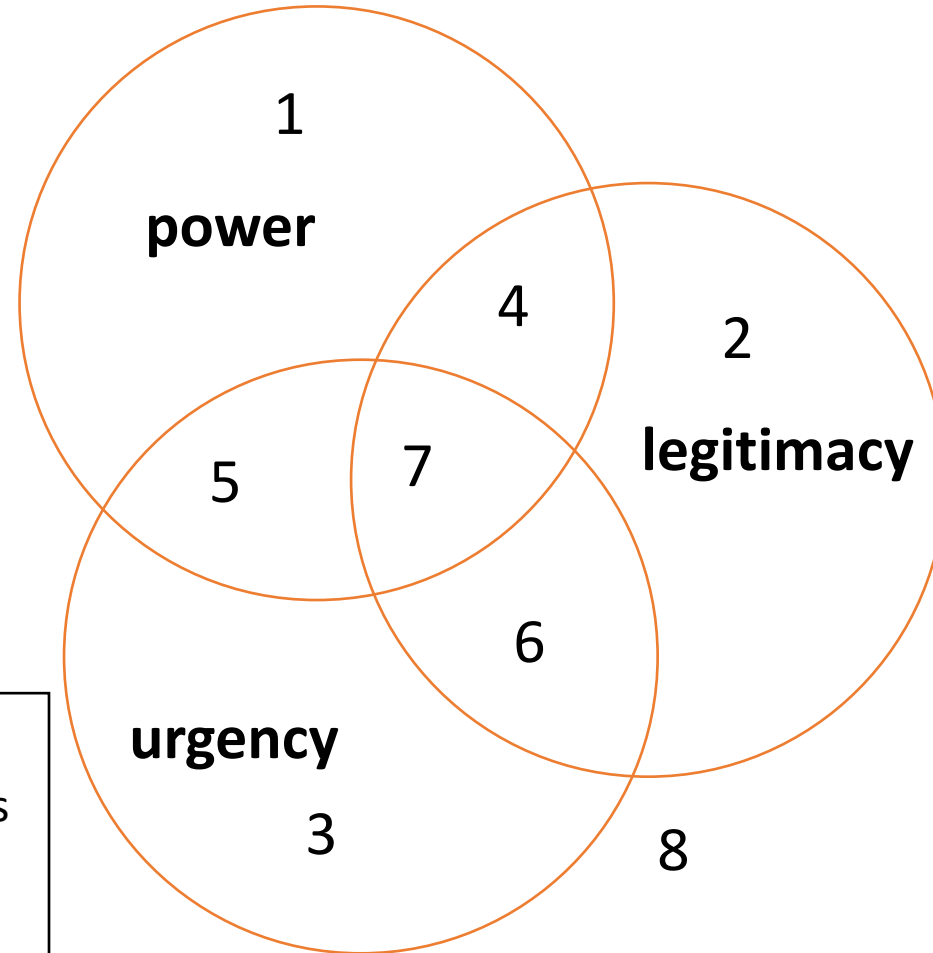
Theoretical frameworks

		Focus of Attention	
		Organization	Academy
Basis of Critique	Primarily Emancipatory	<i>Focus on ideology of 'strategy': structures and processes of domination within organizations and between them and their environments</i>	<i>Focus on structures and processes of ideology and power within the academic strategy field, and within the institutional context of strategy research</i>
	Primarily Epistemological	<i>Focus on radical constructivist, interpretive and other anti-rationalistic approaches to strategy formation, dissemination, realisation, etc</i>	<i>Focus on processes of knowledge creation (philosophical underpinning, empirical methods, argumentative strategies) in the academic literature</i>

Theoretical frameworks

- 1 Dormant
- 2 Discretionary
- 3 Demanding
- 4 Dominant
- 5 Dangerous
- 6 Dependent
- 7 Definitive

1, 2, 3 = Latent stakeholders
4, 5, 6 = Expectant stakeholders
7 = Definitive stakeholders
8 = Potential stakeholders



Methodology

- *A clear description of your choice of methodology, including details of **methods of data collection and analysis**.*
- *This may include **a description of the overall research design** or research approach e.g. qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods research.*
- *It is important to explain **why the proposed research method(s) are the most appropriate methodology** to effectively address your research questions/objectives/hypotheses.*
- *It may also be a good idea to justify the methodology by explaining what **alternatives have been considered and why these have been disregarded**.*

Lincoln (2021)

Methodology

- Structure
 - Research design:
 - Experiments/ Case study/ Surveys/ Action research/ Secondary analysis
 - Research methods
 - Data
 - Data collection instruments: observation/ documentary/ interview/ questionnaires ...
 - Sample: population/ sampling frame/ sample size/ Sampling
 - Data analysis tools
 - How you will analyze data to answer the research question
 - Dummy results
 - Limitations of the research design (and potential remedies)

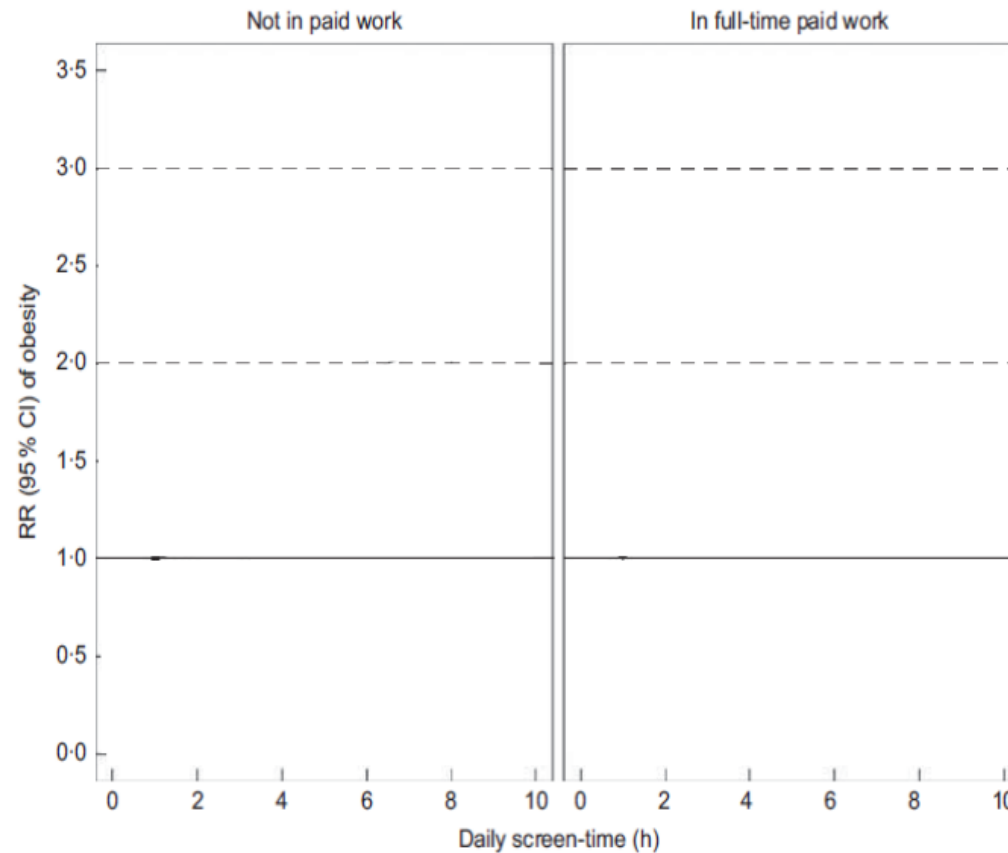
Dummy result – Screen time and Obesity

Table 1 Characteristics of the study population according to total daily screen-time

	Hours of screen-time per day										<i>P</i> for trend
	0–1·9 h		2·0–3·9 h		4·0–5·9 h		6·0–7·9 h		>8 h		
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	
Male											
Urban resident											
Tertiary educated											
Annual income ≥\$AU 70 000											
In full-time paid work											
Current smoker											
Disabled											
Functional capacity (in lower third)											
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Age (years)											
BMI (kg/m ²)											
Alcohol consumption (g/week)											
Vegetable intake (servings/d)											
Fruit intake (servings/d)											
Physical activity (sessions/week)											
Sitting (h/d)											
Standing (h/d)											
Sleeping (h/d)											

Source. https://rsph.anu.edu.au/files/Data_Analysis_Plan_Guide_20131125_0.pdf

Dummy result – Screen time and Obesity



Source. https://rsph.anu.edu.au/files/Data_Analysis_Plan_Guide_20131125_0.pdf

References

- *Include a list all literature sources cited in the proposal using [Harvard style](#) of referencing*

Lincoln (2021)

Additional tips

- *Make the Contribution Clear*
- *Have a Good, Specific Title*
- *Define a Clear Aim and Your Objectives*
 - *be specific about what you are seeking to explore*
 - *Typically, an overarching aim and 3 – 5 objectives works well, and then use these to justify the major approaches*

Lincoln (2021)

Additional tips

- *Have a Strong Research Design and Methodology*
 - *a clear method at the start will help you and potential supervisors determine the viability of your research*
 - *Set out in clear terms your overall approach (e.g. will it be mainly qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods research, does it involve primary data collection and if so, what methods will you use?).*
 - *Justify your approach by engaging in literature on the pros and cons of your specific methodological choices so that you can, for example, justify why survey data might be appropriate, or in-depth interviews are the best approach, or indeed a combination of different methods.*
 - *Also include a clear timeline for completing these tasks along with the other elements of your PhD (literature review, analysis, writing up etc.). A well-developed methodology section is crucial, so include how you will get the data you require and techniques regarding analysis and a rationale for these choices*

Lincoln (2021)

Additional tips

- *Don't Produce a Proposal for 'Mass Consumption'*
 - *If you are applying to multiple institutions make sure you understand and tailor your proposal to the relevant research being undertaken there.*
 - *Readers can easily spot if a proposal has been produced for mass consumption.*
- *Avoid Plagiarism*
- *Let Your Passion for the Topic Shine Through*

Lincoln (2021)

Additional tips

- Title
 - “We often *see titles* of research proposals that are *either far too vague or broad, or too narrow and niche.*” (Lincoln 2021)
- Introduction
 - Need to justify for your choice of research context
 - Research question should be clear and specific
 - Should not ask question: what are the determinants of [...], the question is vague. You should name clearly the determinants you want to emphasize, either in research question or in term of hypotheses
 - Should not ask question: what is *the most* important factor [...]

Additional tips

- Literature review
 - should be presented **in themes** rather than listed one by one research.
- *Methodology*
 - *“We frequently receive feedback from potential supervisors that although they like the research idea, **the applicant has not appreciated or understood the appropriate research methods to conduct the research.**” (Lincoln 2021)*
 - Need to justify your choices

Additional tips

- Presentation
 - Strictly follow Harvard style in referencing
 - Should use zotero (<https://www.zotero.org/>)
 - Check spelling and grammar
 - Can use F7 in MS Word
 - Use Grammarly (<https://www.grammarly.com/>)
 - Use Phrase Bank (<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>)

Additional tips

MANCHESTER
1824
The University of Manchester

Academic Phrasebank

[Introducing Work](#) | [Referring to Sources](#) | [Describing Methods](#) | [Reporting Results](#) | [Discussing Findings](#) | [Writing Conclusions](#)

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Describing Methods

GENERAL LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS

Being Cautious
Being Critical
Classifying and Listing
Compare and Contrast
Defining Terms
Describing Trends
Describing Quantities
Explaining Causality
Giving Examples
Signalling Transition
Writing about the Past

In the Methods section of a dissertation or research article, writers give an account of how they carried out their research. The Methods section should be clear and detailed enough for another experienced person to repeat the research and reproduce the results. Where the methods chosen are new, unfamiliar or perhaps even controversial, or where the intended audience is from many disciplines, the Methods section will tend to be much more extensive. Typical stretches of text found in this section of a research article or dissertation along with examples of the kind of language used for these are listed below. Note that for most of the functional categories in this section, the verbs are written in the simple past tense.

Describing previously used research methods - close

Many researchers have utilised X to measure ...
One of the most well-known tools for assessing ...
Traditionally, X has been assessed by measuring ...
A number of techniques have been developed to ...
Different methods have been proposed to classify ...
X is the main non-invasive method used to determine ...
Different authors have measured X in a variety of ways.

Identifying your potential supervisors

- *Firstly, identify your own interests. What are you aiming to achieve with your research?*
- *Identify a list of potential supervisors relevant to your chosen interest.*
 - *You may refer to the list of available supervisors at Lincoln.*
 - *Draw up a list of potential supervisors and perform relevant background reading about each one. Sometimes researchers can have their own websites in which you can find more details about their work and research interests. It may also be wise to read some of their latest publications[...]. Not only does this give you a better idea as to their speciality of work, but it also shows commitment if you do establish contact with them.*

Jafree, Whitehurst and Rajmohan (2016)

The first email

- *Think of the first email to the supervisor as a cover letter.*
- *The following points should be considered prior to composing the email*
 - *Email etiquette is imperative. Start the email with “Dear” and end it with “Kind Regards”. Spelling and grammar errors are to be avoided*
 - *Good formatting is also essential. Choose an appropriate font size and style. Allow for adequate spacing between lines and between paragraphs.*
 - *A clear subject title should be considered. This should attract a supervisor's attention to you as a potential research student. This may relate to the intended research position i.e.: ‘Interest in Wellcome Trust PhD in Regenerative Medicine’*

Jafree, Whitehurst and Rajmohan (2016)

The first email structure

- *Introduction*

- *State who you are and what you do, or what you intend to do.*
- *It might be beneficial to state how you came to hear about the supervisor*
- *It is useful to put forward an objective e.g.: if you are thinking of applying for a BSc Prize, Scholarship or aspire to present your work at a particular conference, then it is worth mentioning this.*

Jafree, Whitehurst and Rajmohan (2016)

The first email structure

- *Body*
 - *You should promote yourself as a strong candidate*
 - *It is imperative to attach a curriculum vitae (CV) with the email. Highlight the most important points of your CV, such as research experience and commitment to research*
 - *It is useful to mention your interest in the supervisor's field, and why you want to undertake research in their lab. You may wish to mention any publications of theirs you have read.*

Jafree, Whitehurst and Rajmohan (2016)

The first email structure

- *Conclusion*

- *The end of the email should reinforce and summaries why you think you are suitable for the research role. You may even wish to request a meeting with the supervisor to discuss the projects he or she will have available for you*
- *It would be worth mentioning support you may have received i.e.: if your department has nominated you for an award, it would greatly strengthen your claim.*
- *Ideas and aspirations for the future are useful to add here*

Jafree, Whitehurst and Rajmohan (2016)

References

- Jafree, D.J., Whitehurst, K. and Rajmohan, S., 2016. How to approach supervisors for research opportunities. *Annals of medicine and surgery*, 10, pp.110-112.
- Lincoln 2021, *How to Apply for PhD Study in Business*, viewed 7 May 2021, <<https://www.lincoln.ac.uk/home/lbs/research/phdapplications/>>
- Reuber, A.R. and Sharma, P., 2013. The anatomy of a paper.
- Yue, T., Long, R. and Chen, H., 2013. Factors influencing energy-saving behavior of urban households in Jiangsu Province. *Energy Policy*, 62, pp.665-675.

Q&A