

The Henley DBA Programme

Notes on preparing your research proposal

You will need to include a research proposal with your application to join the Doctor of Business Administration Programme. The purpose of these notes is to give you some guidance as you prepare your proposal.

The nature of doctoral research in business and management

Research undertaken as part of the Henley DBA programme seeks to achieve both rigour and relevance and a contribution to both theory and practice.

The proposed area of research needs to be grounded in the relevant business and management literature and needs to make a contribution to that literature: for example by closing a gap in the literature or by extending an existing theory to new areas.

In addition, research undertaken for a DBA must be relevant to practising managers and to organisations. This means that the topic researched should be grounded in a problem faced by managers and organisations and that the results of the research should make a contribution to improving existing practice.

DBA research may fall within a specific subject area within business or management, such as finance, marketing or leadership, for example, but often research topics in business and management may often incorporate elements from multiple disciplines.

The research proposal

The purpose of the research proposal is threefold. First, it will enable Henley Business School to assess the level of your research skills in order to commence a doctoral degree, such as a DBA. Second, it will allow us to evaluate whether your proposed area of research will be suitable for study for a DBA. Finally, it will enable Henley to ensure appropriate supervisory support can be provided to help you to complete your research.

The DBA Programme is designed to help you to refine your ideas for research and to develop your competences to undertake that research. You will undertake a number of assessments, such as a scoping literature review, a draft research design, and data analysis assignments among other crucial building blocks, to help you to develop your research.

Format for the research proposal

The research proposal will be a written document of 1200-1800 words in length, and should be written in an appropriate academic style.

It should address the following key areas:

1. The research area and research question:

This section should identify what you want to research in terms of the research question, or questions, you will address. Where appropriate you may be able to state the hypotheses that you will seek to test, but not all topics are amenable to the statement of hypotheses. You should seek to be as clear and specific as possible in stating your research problem or question.

2. Significant prior research

You are not expected to have completed a full literature review but you should provide an outline of key literature and theories that will underpin your study, reflecting on important theoretical contributions, themes or issues in the area of enquiry. You should also reference key authors and/or theories that have informed your current thinking and contributed to the understanding of the topic. You can access academic literature via public libraries. In addition, you can search through Google Scholar [open-access articles](#) for articles that are available to the public.

3. The importance of the research for theory and practice

This section addresses the question of whether the research is worthwhile. Accordingly, you should indicate concisely why there is a need for the research - both the literature and from the perspective of organisations.

4. Your interest in the topic

Any research undertaken at doctoral level will present a challenge and it is important that you have a deep and enduring interest in the focus of the research. In addition, a DBA programme seeks to develop the individual researcher as well as an understanding of the topic. Accordingly, this section should briefly outline your motivation and interest in undertaking research in the area selected.

5. Possible research approach or research methodology

This section relates to how the researcher proposes to approach the research. Although it is recognised that a detailed understanding of research methodology will be developed during the DBA, it is important to provide an indication of the intended methodology. For example, will a qualitative or quantitative methodology be appropriate, and will data be obtained using questionnaires, interviews, simulations, or existing data, for example? Importantly, how will you gain access to collect the suggested data?

6. The contribution you wish to make

In addition to showing that the research is important for theory and practice, doctoral research must make a contribution to that theory and practice. In terms of theory, this could

be developing a new model to understand the relationships between variables, or developing our understanding of a new phenomenon. With regard to practice, the contribution could be to improve processes in organisations or to develop techniques to help managers. If possible, it would be helpful for you to outline what you think your contributions would be.

7. Referencing

You will need to provide a list of key articles or texts at the end of your research proposal. References should be listed in the appropriate style for your subject area (e.g. Harvard referencing style). You should only reference texts that you think are central to your proposed work, rather than a bibliography listing everything written on the subject.

8. Any other relevant information

Finally, you should provide any other information you consider relevant to support your application relating to the research area.

Important tips to ensure you present your research proposal most effectively

- A potential and focused level of detail is expected throughout the research proposal by moving between the broad academic and/or industry review and the DBA candidate's added value in theory and practice, i.e. the research outcome is where the DBA candidate states in detail the value they bring to the body of knowledge in the literature and practice.
- A section or sub-section (under one of the 8-key areas) on the *Accordance* of your research proposal with one or more of the Research Areas at Henley Business School, will help the DBA Academic Committee to appoint the most appropriate available supervisors. Please browse our webpages dedicated to [Henley Research Areas](#).
- Using key references in the literature review section, e.g. authoritative sources: academic books and peer-reviewed academic articles, quality journals, industry and consultancy reports, government white papers, etc., adds a core value and shows the gap in theory and practice. As mentioned above, the selected references need to provide a broad review for the industry or the field of specialisation of the suggested research topic, and also, to provide a level of detail to inform a focused research proposal.
- Whilst it is helpful to breakdown a research topic into paragraphs to cover different related aspects, it is also important to give examples to demonstrate the argument in practice, which also helps the DBA candidate to reflect on their experience and specialised knowledge. Those examples might be models, systems, case studies, data sources, etc., which the DBA candidate thinks are relevant to the research scope.
- Using charts and tables or other graphical material (with reference in the text) makes complex arguments clear and presents the ideas effectively. The DBA candidate can use and

reference in their research proposal high resolution material from references in the literature review section or other sources.

- Please set all titles, text, etc. in the same style throughout the research proposal and ensure the document includes your name.
- You may find this additional guidance helpful from the [Doctoral and Researcher College Website](#).