



Admission Research Proposal Guidelines

Ph.D. Programme in Communication (Research Mode)

1. Purpose and Nature of the Admission Research Proposal

Applicants to the Doctor of Philosophy (Communication) Research Mode at the School of Communication, Xiamen University Malaysia (XMUM) are required to submit a research proposal as part of application. Termed the Admission Research Proposal, this document is deliberately brief and fulfils two key functions:

1. To enable the Admission Committee to evaluate the applicant's academic preparation, conceptual clarity, and ability to conduct doctoral-level independent research in Communication; and
2. To enable the School identify and assign a supervisor whose research expertise most closely match the applicant's proposed research area.

The Admission Research Proposal is intended as an initial indication of research direction, not a final or fixed plan. Once admitted, applicants will work with their assigned supervisor to further develop, refine, and, where appropriate, substantially revise their proposal during the early stage of their doctoral programme.

2. General Rules for Submission

- **Language:** The proposal must be written in **English**. Applicants who intend to conduct research primarily in Mandarin or Bahasa Malaysia may indicate this in the methodology section, but the proposal document itself must be submitted in English.
- **Length:** The proposal (excluding the reference list) should be **between 2,000 and 3,000 words**. Proposals that substantially exceed this range may be returned to the applicant for revision prior to review.
- **Formatting:** A4 paper size; Times New Roman, 12-point font; 1.5 line spacing; Layout - Size A4, Margins - Moderate; all pages numbered.
- **Referencing Style:** **APA (7th edition)** must be used consistently for in-text citations and the reference list.
- **File Format and Naming:** The proposal must be submitted as a single **PDF file**, named as: **Surname_FirstName_XMUMPCM_RP**
- **Originality:** The proposal must be the applicant's own original work. It must not reproduce, without proper citation and acknowledgement, text from published sources, other applicants' work, or the applicant's own previously submitted or published material.
- **Submission Channel and Deadline:** The **proposal must be submitted to our Postgraduate Recruitment Office by the stipulated application deadline**. Late or incomplete submissions may not be considered.
- **Confidentiality:** Proposals are used solely for internal admission assessment and supervisor-matching purposes and will be treated as confidential by the School.



3. Required Structure and Content

Every Admission Research Proposal must contain the following components, presented in the order below and under clearly labelled headings. Suggested word allocations are indicative rather than prescriptive, and applicants should adjust emphasis according to the nature of their proposed research.

No.	Section	Description / Requirement	Suggested Length
1	Title of Proposed Research	A concise, specific working title indicating the topic, focus, and communication sub-field.	~15 words
2	Applicant & Research Track Information	Full name, intended research area and, if known, preferred supervisor(s) whose expertise aligns with the proposal.	100–150 words
3	Background and Rationale	The context of the research problem, why it matters academically and socially, and the gap in current knowledge or practice that motivates the study.	300–400 words
4	Problem Statement	A clear, focused statement of the specific issue the research intends to address.	100–150 words
5	Research Questions / Objectives	2–4 research questions or objectives that are specific, researchable, and consistent with the problem statement.	100–150 words
6	Preliminary Literature Review	A brief, critical (not merely descriptive) engagement with key studies and debates relevant to the topic, identifying the specific gap the proposal addresses.	400–600 words
7	Theoretical / Conceptual Framework	The theory, model, or conceptual lens (e.g., media effects, framing, political economy of communication, uses and gratifications, intercultural communication theory) that will anchor the study.	150–250 words
8	Proposed Research Methodology	The likely research paradigm (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods), data collection methods, sampling approach, and analytical strategy. Applicants are not expected to finalise methodology at this stage.	300–400 words
9	Significance and Contribution	The anticipated theoretical, practical, and policy contributions of the study, including its relevance to communities, industry, or public interest.	150–200 words
10	ESD Value Reflection Statement	A mandatory, separately headed statement on how the proposed research engages with, or is informed by, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) values (see Section 5).	200–300 words
11	Indicative Timeline	A tentative multi-year plan (coursework, data collection, analysis, writing, publication, conference) mapped against the normal candidature period.	1 table, ~1 page
12	References	A reference list in APA (7th edition) style of all works cited in the proposal.	Not counted in word limit



4. Indicative Research Timeline (Template)

Applicants should include a simple timeline table similar to the one below, adapted to their own proposed research, to demonstrate that the scope of the study is realistic within the normal candidature period.

Phase	Key Activity	Indicative Period (for reference purposes)
Phase 1	Coursework and refinement of research proposal with supervisor	Year 1
Phase 2	Literature review consolidation, instrument/design development, ethics approval	Year 1–2
Phase 3	Data collection	Year 2
Phase 4	Data analysis and draft chapters	Year 2–3
Phase 5	Thesis writing, review, and oral defence	Final year

5. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Value Reflection Statement

As part of its institutional commitment to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and to nurturing researchers who are conscious of the wider social, cultural, environmental, and ethical implications of their scholarship, the **School of Communication requires every applicant to include a dedicated ESD Value Reflection Statement (200–300 words) as a distinct, clearly headed section of the proposal.**

This statement is not a separate research topic and should not be treated as an add-on. Rather, it asks the applicant to **reflect critically on the relationship between their proposed research and the values associated with sustainable, responsible, and ethical communication.** The statement should address, where relevant:

- How the proposed research connects, directly or indirectly, to one or more dimensions of sustainable development (e.g., social equity, cultural preservation, environmental communication, media literacy, responsible technology use, community wellbeing, or the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals);
- The applicant's personal understanding of, and commitment to, ethical, inclusive, and socially responsible communication research and practice; and
- How the applicant anticipates their doctoral research contributing positively to society, industry, policy, or community beyond its academic contribution.

The Admission Committee recognizes that not every communication research topic has an obvious or direct sustainability dimension. Applicants are therefore encouraged to reflect honestly and thoughtfully rather than to force an artificial connection. Genuine, well-reasoned reflection is valued more highly than the use of sustainability terminology without substantive engagement.



6. Evaluation Criteria

The Admission Committee will assess each proposal against the following criteria. The proposal is evaluated as a whole; no single criterion determines the outcome in isolation.

Criterion	Description
Clarity and Focus	The research problem, questions, and objectives are clearly and coherently articulated.
Academic Merit and Originality	The proposal demonstrates awareness of existing scholarship and identifies a credible gap or original angle.
Feasibility	The proposed scope of study is realistic and achievable within the normal candidature period.
Methodological Soundness	The proposed approach is appropriate, or capable of being developed into an appropriate design, for the research questions.
Fit with School Expertise	The topic aligns with the research strengths of the School of Communication, enabling appropriate supervisor matching.
Engagement with ESD / Ethical Awareness	The applicant demonstrates genuine reflection on the sustainability, ethical, and societal dimensions of the proposed research.
Academic Writing Quality	The proposal is well organised, clearly written, and properly referenced.

7. Declaration of Originality

Applicants must include, as the final page of the proposal, a signed declaration in substantially the following form:

"I declare that this Admission Research Proposal is my own original work, prepared specifically for the purpose of applying to the Doctor of Philosophy (Communication) programme (Research Mode) at the School of Communication, Xiamen University Malaysia. All sources consulted have been properly acknowledged and cited. I understand that any act of plagiarism or misrepresentation may result in the rejection of my application or, if discovered after admission, disciplinary action."

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____



8. Important Notes to Applicants

- The Admission Research Proposal is assessed for potential and preparedness, not for a finished research design. Applicants are not expected, and are not required, to have finalised their methodology, sampling, or instruments at this stage.
- Shortlisted applicants may be invited to an interview, at which they may be asked to elaborate on, clarify, or defend aspects of their proposal.
- Assignment of a supervisor at the offer stage is based on the closest available match between the applicant's proposed area and the research expertise of School of Communication faculty, and is subject to supervisor availability.
- The School reserves the right to request a revised or clarified proposal from an applicant before a final admission decision is made.
- All submitted proposals may be screened using similarity/plagiarism-detection software.

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