Guidelines on Writing a Research Proposal:
Cardiff School of English, Communication and Philosophy

The quality of your research proposal will largely determine your success or failure when applying to complete postgraduate research (PhD or MPhil) in the School of English, Communication and Philosophy at Cardiff. Hence it is important that you devote due time to formulating your research questions in a lucid and persuasive manner. You should situate your proposal in relation to relevant critical and / or theoretical literature, specify and justify your methodology and offer a broad initial outline of the structure of the research. You should also ensure that the proposal is focused and concise, so edit and reedit your material before you make a formal application.

The advice given below is designed to help you produce a high-quality proposal and show you the criteria that we use in our internal assessment. Remember that the research proposal forms a vital element in providing us with evidence of your commitment and motivation to undertake research study and your potential to make a good research student. The proposal should demonstrate that you have thought seriously about the intended field of your research and the difference that your own contribution will make.

Regard writing the proposal as the first part of your research training. It should show us that you have undertaken some preliminary research in your area. At the same time remember that the proposal is just the first stage in a gradual process and will be refined and changed once the research itself gets underway.

What you should try to demonstrate:

1. That there is a good fit between your proposal and existing expertise to supervise your topic within the School of English, Communication and Philosophy. You should consult the website for staff interests before you write the proposal at: http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/encap/contactsandpeople/academic/index.html.

2. That you have a good familiarity with the broad body of existing scholarship in your proposed field of study (include references). Appending an initial bibliography of expected key sources is a good way to do this.

3. That you have attempted to clarify your initial research questions so that the proposal is focused and has a strong purpose and direction.

4. That you are clear about the methodological approach that will enable you best to address these research questions and are also clear about why you are adopting this approach.

5. That you are capable of independent critical thinking and analysis so that the internal assessors can be confident about the prospect of working with you.

6. That you think and write clearly, concisely and coherently so that internal assessors do not have to keep rereading the proposal in the hope of understanding it.

How to write the proposal:

1. Clarify the working title.

2. Establish your key research objectives in terms of basic research questions, hypotheses, or propositions. Why does your research excite you? What value might it add to the subject? Is your proposed thesis achievable given the timescale and resources available to you?

3. Situate it in relation to the wider field of study. Does it contest existing work? How does it relate to expertise within the School?

4. Reflect on the research methods that you will use, and explain why you have chosen them. Are they innovative?

5. Provide a general indication of the proposed stages of the research, the timetable involved, and any possible difficulties that might arise and how you might overcome them.

6. List key references according to recognized bibliographic conventions at the end and refer to them in the proposal.

Aim to write a proposal that is approximately 1000-1500 words in length. Bear in mind that it is a general outline and should demonstrate your ability to write concisely and coherently and to sustain an argument. There is no intrinsic advantage to writing at greater length, although a proposal of just 2-3 paragraphs will not be sufficient.

Note for candidates to the Centre for Language and Communication Research
Applicants to the PhD in Language and Communication Research will need to describe in detail any planned data collection or corpus building required for the completion of their proposed project. This should include a description of potential difficulties both logistical and ethical that they are likely to encounter and suggest how these issues will be resolved. In addition, they need to indicate clearly if they will require any training in specific software such as that used to transcribe and store data or statistics programmes used to analyse and visualise their data.