

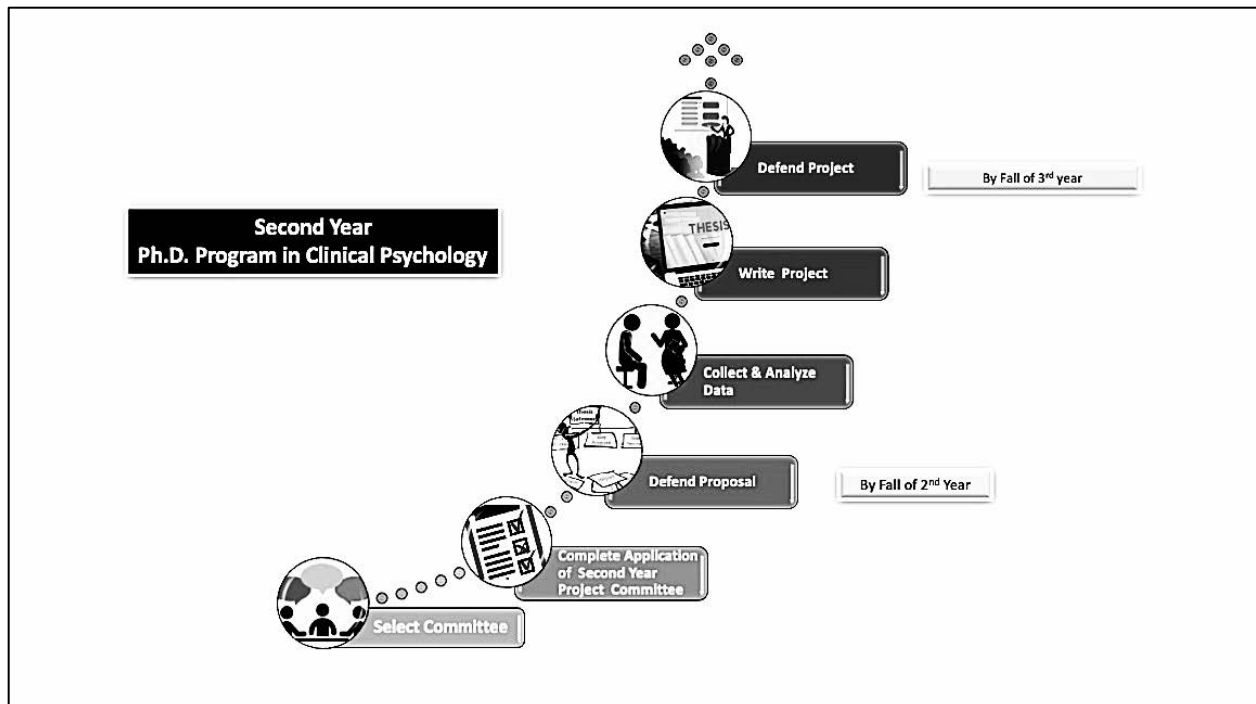
## Second Year Project Guidelines

The Clinical Psychology PhD program's **research training** is a series of doctoral research practice that include a core member of the program faculty and students at various levels in the program addressing research questions within the faculty member's areas of research interest and expertise.

All students enroll in a research practicum during the first semester of their first year and continue in the seminar at least until they complete a project proposal.

These guidelines aim to help students in the preparation of proposals, second year project's final draft and its defense, while complying with the Doctoral Program and The Graduate College's procedures and requirements.

Below are the different steps needed to complete the Second Year Project, and a Project Proposal Guideline.



# Procedure

## Second Year Project procedures include:

### 1.) Setting Up the Project Committee

- a. Students need to initiate this process by meeting with their advisors.
- b. Committee will be constituted by at least 3 members, including the mentor.
- c. At least two members (primary advisory +1) need to be Ph.D. core faculty or UTRGV faculty with expertise in the relevant area. Committee members need to have a doctoral degree.
- d. The committee could have a member from outside the department or University.
- e. Outside member should be a content expert with a Doctoral degree, and tenured or in tenure track.
- f. Students need to notify the Research Committee if having an outside member. In the event of having an outside member. The mentor has to make sure that procedure is followed, and the outside member is qualified.

### 2.) Complete an [Application for Thesis Committee Form](#), and submit the form to your advisor. It will be signed and routed to the Director of Clinical Training.

### 3.) Proposal

- a. The students will prepare a research proposal following the guidelines presented at the end of this document.
- b. The students need to obtain their mentor's approval before sending the proposal to the Project Committee.
- c. After approval is granted, students will send a final copy of the proposal to all committee member, **at least two weeks before the scheduled** oral presentation
- d. **Second Year Project proposal date.**
  - i. Due to the availability of members, the defense should preferably occur during the academic year (no holidays).
  - ii. The student will orally defend the proposal in a formal meeting with Second Year Project's Committee members.
- e. **Second Year Project proposal duration:** 60-90 minutes. 15-30 for presentation and the rest for questions
- f. Students need to follow [UTRGV formatting guidelines](#) in conjunction with APA guidelines or use another format specified by their committee chair.
- g. **Second Year Project proposal suggested deadline:** *Fall of second (2<sup>nd</sup>) year.* If needed, the student could request an extension to the committee.

### 4.) Once approval of the proposal is obtained from committee members, **the student will collect the data (if applicable) and later complete data analyses.**

### 5.) **Second Year Project Defense:**

- a. The students need to obtain their mentor's approval before sending the project to the Project Committee

- b. Students are required to provide a hard (paper) or electronic copy of their thesis document to all committee members and to the Department of Psychological Science Program Specialist ***at least two weeks before the scheduled defense meeting.***
- c. A minimum of ***two weeks public notice*** must be provided to all committee members.
- d. The **Second Year Project** defense meeting will be open to all members of the Department and of the University. The project presentation by the student is open to public. The defense will be restricted to the committee.
- e. **Second Year Project suggested deadline:** By Fall of third (3<sup>rd</sup>) Year. If needed, the student could request an extension to the committee
- f. **Second Year Project defense date:** Due to the availability of members, the defense should preferably occur during the academic year (no holidays).
- g. **Second Year Project defense duration:** 60-90 minutes. 15-30 for presentation and the rest for questions.
- h. The committee will submit their evaluation and **second year project** to the Director of Clinical Training.

## Quick View of the Process and Requirements for Second Year Project

1. Thesis Committee:
  - a. Student needs to initiate it
  - b. 3 members, including the mentor.
  - c. At least two members (primary advisory +1) need to be core or affiliate faculty.
  - d. It could have a member from outside the department or University.
  - e. Outside member should be a content expert with a Doctoral degree. (Tenure Track/Tenure)
  - f. Student needs to notify the Research Committee if having an outside member.
  - g. In the event of having an outside member, the mentor has to make sure that procedure is followed, and the outside member is qualified.
2. Complete Application of Thesis Committee
  - a. Once the committee has been selected; Students need to complete an application (Graduate Office Form)
  - b. If there is a change of committee member(s) at any time, a Change of Committee form must be submitted (Graduate Office Form)
3. Proposal – By Fall of 2<sup>nd</sup> Year
  - a. Need mentor's approval before is sent to the Thesis Committee
  - b. Send a final copy of the proposal to all committee members, at least two weeks before the scheduled Master Thesis proposal date.
  - c. Due to the availability of members, the defense should preferably occur during the academic year (no holidays).
  - d. The student will orally defend the proposal in a formal meeting with Master's Committee members.
  - e. Once approval of the proposal is obtained from committee members, the student will collect the data (if applicable) and later complete data analyses.
  - f. Students need to follow UTRGV formatting guidelines in conjunction with APA guidelines or use another format specified by their committee chair.
  - g. If needed, the student could request an extension to the committee
  - h. Proposal
    - i. Duration: 60-90 minutes. 15-30 for presentation and the rest for questions.
4. Defense – By Fall of 3<sup>rd</sup> Year
  - a. A minimum of two weeks public notice must be provided to all committee members.
  - b. Students are required to provide a hard (paper) copy or electronic of their thesis document to all committee members and to the Department of Psychological Science Program Specialist at least two weeks before the scheduled defense meetings.
  - c. The Master's Thesis defense meeting will be open to all members of the Department and of the University.

- d. Due to the availability of members, the defense should preferably occur during the academic year (no holidays).
  - e. If needed, the student could request an extension to the committee
  - f. Defense:
    - i. Duration: 60-90 minutes. 15-30 for presentation and the rest for questions.
    - ii. Presentation by the student is open to public. The defense will be restricted to the committee.
    - iii. The committee will submit their evaluation to the DCT who will send it to the graduate office.
5. Forms
- a. Student can find the forms, manuals, formatting guide, and other information at <https://www.utrgv.edu/graduate/for-new-and-current-students/thesis-and-dissertation/index.htm>

**Second Year Project's completion is one of the requirements to becoming a Ph.D. Candidate.**

# Proposal Guidelines<sup>1</sup>

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# Overview

The proposal is an essential step toward the completion of the Second Year Project .

At the proposal stage, you are not expected to have explored all the ramifications of your subject -- that's what the Second Year Project itself is for, but you need to establish that the work can be done within the time available and that it will make a contribution to existing literature.

The proposal generally follows the outline of what the Second Year Project will become. The principle is that the proposal needs to contain what is necessary to understand the study itself and to provide coherence and continuity to statements of problem, hypotheses, and analysis.

## Distinguishing the proposal from the final Second Year Project

The key distinction between the proposal and the Second Year Project is that the proposal describes something you intend to do while the Second Year Project describes something you have done. For example:

- ▣ In a proposal: The purpose of the research is to...
- ▣ In a Second Year Project: The purpose of the research was to...
- ▣ In a proposal: The respondents will be interviewed...
- ▣ In a Second Year Project: The respondents were interviewed...

Your Second Year Project proposal should be developed in consultation with your committee chair. It is required that you orally present your proposal to the committee at a **Second Year Project proposal meeting**. You should be prepared to summarize the background, aims, and methods of your study and answer questions from committee members. The Second Year Project proposal should be provided to members at least two weeks ahead of the scheduled proposal meeting.

## Developing content for your written proposal

- ▣ Ask your Chair for one or two examples of Second Year Project proposals that you might use as a model for your own proposal.
- ▣ Develop a **timeline** for your proposal. Break the proposal down into manageable chunks and set completion date goals for each chunk/component. Doing so will allow you to more realistically assess whether you are on target for completing your finished proposal. In the timeline, cater to the time it will take your Chair (10-15 days) to review each draft of your proposal and the time it will take your committee to review it (15 days). Pay careful attention to deadlines set by the Graduate College.
- ▣ Try to avoid using articles over 10 years old unless there is some justification for doing so (e.g., article describes development of a measure you'll be using, article is a seminal work upon which many subsequent studies are based, article uses a unique methodology that has not been used in other works you've read, classic statistical articles that make the important/fundamental contributions).
- ▣ Maintain an organized bibliography. Using software such as *Endnote* should help with this, but if you are using hardcopy articles, you should focus on keeping the information organized by topic/date, etc.
- ▣ As you come across ideas or new titles, note them down in a notebook or in your cellphone (notes) that you carry with you. What may appear as fleeting thoughts may facilitate your thinking around the Second Year Project topics.
- ▣ Work collaboratively if you can: ask friends to look out for articles or book chapters that you might be interested in.
- ▣ Keep your Second Year Project Chair updated on your progress and arrange to meet with them to provide updates or seek guidance.

## Setting up your proposal in Word

Use Word's HEADING STYLES feature for your headings and subheadings. This will allow you to organize your document a lot easier and provide a way to automatically generate a Table of Contents with the correct page numbers. It also allows you to jump to various sections of the document as you're working on it using a navigation feature. Include only chapter titles and main headings within each chapter in the Table of Contents. Watch this short video about the process [here](#).

## Bibliographic/reference management software

Consider using **Endnote**, or a similar reference manager tool. Endnote software is available through a UTRGV subscription and can be downloaded for *free* by following the instructions [here](#). It may take a little time to get used to but will make revisions much easier. In simple terms, Endnote involves the creation of a database of references that you can import from various sources and then easy insertion of those references into your Word document. There are lots of tutorials online, but here are a few videos that give you a sense of how Endnote works: [Video 1](#) • [Video 2](#) • [Video 3](#)

## Sections of Second Year Project proposal

The structure of the proposal is generally as follows:

- Abstract
- Overall aims and general questions to be addressed
- Background and significance
- Specific research questions and hypotheses
- Method
- Analysis strategy
- Limitations and implications
- References

The first three sections correspond to what the APA Style Manual calls the "Introduction." We suggest breaking them out into these particular headings given their specific importance to a well-planned proposal, as we describe further below. However, consult with your committee chair regarding the final structure and organization of your proposal, as styles and formats may vary by subfield.

In general, the proposal needs be 20-30 pages long, with at least 20-25 pages dedicated to introduction, method, and proposed data analysis sections (This number does not include references, tables and/or figures).

The APA manual, officially titled *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* should be regarded as the primary guidebook on style.

### Overall Aims

This section consists of one to two paragraphs of introduction. It briefly defines your research problem, the study you propose to do, and what you hope to establish. It is essentially an abstract, but one that serves as well as an outline for what follows. It should ensure that there are no major surprises in the remainder of the proposal.

## Background and Significance

This section is a description of the general problem area, defining constructs, what is generally thought to be known about your problem, and the key unresolved issue(s) that you are going to be addressing. While literature should be cited, this section is not necessarily the full literature review to be used in the Second Year Project itself. You should cite enough sources to make clear that you've read widely enough in the field to know what the major issues are. Your readers need to know that other people agree that your issue is important, but not necessarily everything they've ever said about it. Each major point should probably have two or three references. At the end of this section, the readers should believe:

- ▣ you've identified a question that others are interested in
- ▣ there's enough that's been done in the field to give you a solid background for getting into the project (i.e., you're not trying to create a new field all by yourself)
- ▣ you know enough about the vocabulary and structure, previous findings, and methodology of the field to be able to understand what you're reading, to use specialized terminology appropriately, and to identify gaps or contradictions in the existing literature to provide the rationale for the study you propose.

## Research Questions and Hypotheses

This section is where you define specifically what issues you're investigating and what you expect to find. There need be no more than one major research question, and there should almost never be more than three.

The research questions are brief statements of unresolved issues in the field that you plan to investigate. They should be couched in terms of the vocabulary of the field that you've been describing. They are phrased as open questions, such as "What is the relation between X and Y?" or "In situations characterized by X, what changes occur in Y?"

Hypotheses, by contrast, are phrased as declarative statements about particular variables: "X is inversely related to Y." It may be useful to include a picture of your model showing key relations that you hypothesize to exist.

Remember: it's not a sin to state a hypothesis that later turns out to be unsupported; you don't have to do the analysis to prove it ahead of time. Hypotheses simply have to be plausible given your discussion of the issues. They gain plausibility either from logic or from previous findings or from theoretical predictions.

At the end of these three sections, the readers should be able to understand a clear theoretical framework for your study.

## Method

This section is a description of the data you will use to test your hypotheses, the sources of the data, the variables that you plan to extract from the data, and the operational definitions of the

variables. If you are planning a secondary analysis of someone else's data, you need to describe their study in enough detail that the readers do not have to go back and look it up to understand the data. If you are planning original data collection, you need to describe how you are going to go about it and establish that it is feasible to do what you plan to do. In addition, if your project involves recruitment of human subjects, please provide a description of your recruitment plan, including a timeline for obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Specific techniques such as surveys, interviews, or observation should be described in some detail. If you're taking measurements from someone else, it is helpful to include specific questions used in the previous study. If you're going to construct new items (such as might be included in an original survey), you need to include enough items that you can use them to construct valid scales and give an indication of how these items will be formatted into an instrument.

A clear description of the variables is essential. The constructs should have been introduced in the previous section, so you don't need more conceptual definition. Rather, what you need here is clear *operational* definition -- that is, the specific measures in your data that will represent each concept in your analysis.

The readers need to understand just what specific data items you are planning to put into your analysis.

Most **Second Year Project** are quantitative in nature, largely because that's what we've primarily taught. If you are planning a more qualitative study, you still need a careful definition in this section of what you're going to be looking for and how you'll tell if you've found it. For example, you should include a description of how you're going to take your observational or interview protocols and code and/or interpret them.

### Analysis Strategy

This section outlines what you're going to do with the data when you've collected it. It need not be elaborate, but it does need to indicate how you will test each hypothesis. That is, you must propose statistics that match your variables and the kind of inferences you plan to make about them. For example, don't propose to calculate a product-moment correlation coefficient between category variables such as gender and hair color.

It is sufficient to say that a given relation/association will be tested with ANOVA, or correlation; you don't have to provide information on all the specific contrasts you might test or all the coefficients you'll examine. The point is that the readers have to be able to understand that you know when specific kinds of statistics are appropriate, and that you know how to interpret them to test your hypotheses.

If you're working with more qualitative data you still need to provide information on how you're going to treat them -- coding, cross-indexing, pattern matching, memoing, etc. Again, the committee members need to see that you have a plan of action for using the data to evaluate your hypotheses.

## References

Be sure to include an accurate list of references using APA style. If you are using a bibliographic reference manager, such as Endnote, this should be created automatically for you as you insert citations. However, it is still a good idea to check it for errors.

# Writing the Proposal

When you've got an initial draft of the proposal, it's often helpful to let your friends look at it. Peer review works as well among students as it does for journals or granting agencies. The important point is to be sure that you've *clearly* described things. If it confuses your friends, you can be certain it will confuse your committee members.

Your final draft should be done in a clear and readable font and in a reasonable font size (12-point). It should be printed with a quality printer. If your spelling/grammar is not very good, be sure to have it checked by someone (e.g., University Writing Center). Check the References section to be sure all entries exactly match the text.

The visual impression conveyed by your proposal predisposes the reader to judgments. Sloppy copy looks like a sign of a sloppy mind.

## Summary

The Second Year Project proposal should not be a major stumbling block. If, in your research, things don't turn out exactly as you described in the proposal, no one is going to send you back to Square One. Every researcher knows that the unexpected things that happen during a project are often more interesting than what they set out to look at. The main caution in a Second Year Project proposal is to keep the problem *bounded* and *manageable*. Take on only what's reasonable.

Remember what the proposal process is really all about -- to develop a clear and realistic plan of action for your Second Year Project. Your Second Year Project should be an academic piece that contributes to the extant literature and takes the field forward. Your committee members, particularly your Second Year Project Chair, are there to help you.

# Supplemental Information:



## The literature review.

Good overview of collecting, organizing, and writing a literature review. Targeted more toward the final thesis or dissertation, but still worth reviewing before writing the proposal.



## The research proposal.

Simple and clear guidance on preparing the research proposal. Definitely worth watching.

GOOD LUCK!