

MA Major Research Paper (MRP) Proposals in Philosophy: Purpose, Objective, Guidelines

Major Research Papers (MRPs) are 7,500-10,000 word research papers that demonstrate a high level of scholarship and intensive research. Broadly speaking, they are modelled on research papers that could be submitted to a refereed philosophy journal or conference. MRPs are meant to demonstrate research capacities and skills at this level.

The Purpose of MRP Proposals—and the basis for their assessment:

The MRP *Proposal* is written *before* the MRP. It should demonstrate that the student has a philosophically viable MRP project, at a suitably high level of scholarship, that is feasible for them to complete and defend. It should also demonstrate ability to research and master a body of scholarship appropriate for the MRP topic.

The Proposal is assessed by the Graduate Studies Committee (GSC). The GSC's decision to accept the Proposal indicates that the student is ready to proceed with writing the MRP itself, under the guidance of their supervisor(s), taking any feedback from the GSC into consideration.

General Objectives and Guidelines for writing MRP Proposals:

There is no one formula for writing an MRP Proposal. Like all philosophical writing, it is a solution to a problem of making a complex issue as clear and accessible as possible, with suitable support, within a limited number of words (see below). The audience is a committee beyond the student's supervisor and the MRP examination committee.

As a general guideline your MRP proposal should address the following questions (not necessarily in this sequential order):

What's the claim?	You are adding to existing philosophical analyses, arguments, scholarly interpretations, etc., through your own analyses and research. What is your claim?
What are your reasons?	To add a claim to existing philosophical analyses, etc., you need to provide reasons for your claim. What are your reasons?
What's the scholarly basis?	What scholarship, analyses, conceptual points, etc. are you drawing on? This concerns the context to which your point contributes and on which it draws.
What's new?	What is your MRP contributing that is not already out there in scholarship? What's new in your claim?
Who cares?	What is the significance of your claim? Why does it matter to philosophy, or to discussions of the topic addressed? What makes the work worth doing?

Typically, a succinct 3-6 sentence thesis statement will encapsulate an answer to all these questions: "The MRP will claim that P, by drawing on research materials B, in the context set by those materials. It will add something new, N, in ways that are significant and worth caring about. The reasons for claiming that P are roughly R (or along the lines of R)." Typically, discussion of the scholarly basis and context is no more than 40% of the proposal. Discussion of the claim and an outline of the reasons for it constitutes a substantive part of the proposal, with the remaining elements (what's new, why it matters) having equal emphasis. (See our separate guide to writing proposals for further suggestions.)

Format: Proposals are to be no more than 3000 words, including all footnotes/endnotes, but not the bibliography or title. The proposal is double spaced and submitted electronically, preferably as an editable document (DOCX, or RTF), to facilitate review and comment by the committee (PDFs may also be submitted). The bibliography is formatted in Chicago style; generally, it is expected that it will comprise 30-40 items.

Process and Timeline: An initial draft of the proposal is to be submitted to your supervisor by the end of month 9 of your program (May 31 for students beginning in Sep), with the proposal submitted to the GSC by the end of month 12. ('Fast track' students arrange a shorter timeline with supervisors.) You will have to see the GPD if your proposal has not been submitted by the end of month 16. **Proposals must be approved by your supervisor prior to submission.** Submit via email to the GPD, cc'ing your supervisor. The GSC reviews the proposal, assessing it as: Accepted as is; Accepted with minor revisions (to be discussed by supervisor & student, does not need to be resubmitted); Accepted with major revisions (needs to be resubmitted to GSC, for another review); or Rejected.