

■ Guidance for Preparing a Research Plan

Among all application documents, your research plan is the most important document because it can determine your admission to university. Here are some tips of how to prepare a good research plan.

(1) Selecting your research topic

Selecting a good research topic is very important to be selected as a JDS Fellow. Checking the following points are strongly suggested;

- Is your research topic in line with a Sub-programme/Component of your choice? (See Section 2. FIELD OF STUDY of the JDS application guidelines for details)
- Is your research topic important for the socio-economic development of your country?
- Is your research topic related to your current duties and/or future career plan? It is desirable to discuss your research plan with your immediate supervisors upon application.
- Does your research topic contribute to achieving your organizational goal?

1) Selecting your graduate school (if you have the option to choose from multiple universities). Read "Graduate Course Outline" in the appendix of the JDS application guideline or visit the website of the graduate school; confirm requirements and characteristics of the graduate programme, and if your research interest is related to the programme. (To apply for the JDS Programme, you have to choose one graduate school from the list of accepting universities.)

2) Check the list of faculty members; Confirm if any faculty member whose field of expertise coincides with your area of interest, and if he/she can guide you as a possible academic supervisor. Please note that only professors and assistant professors can supervise your research in the most graduate schools. Therefore, do not expect lectures as your possible academic supervisor.

You are advised to read three or more academic publications of the potential academic supervisor; find out if the potential academic supervisor's research approach is suitable to your research topic, and if your research topic would be academically attractive to the faculty members of the graduate school.

(2) Understanding the meaning of RESEARCH

Before you prepare a research plan, understanding the nature of research is essential. Research is defined as the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies and understandings. This could include synthesis and analysis of previous research to the extent that it leads to new and creative outcomes (https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/research/researchers/preparing_a_grant_application/dest_definition_of_research). In other words, you have to know that your research findings are new to the world. Document survey that you read past academic papers related to your research paper is important.

You are also recommended to think about the time frame of your research in Japan. Generally, on your first year, you will attend many courses to learn the basic idea and analytical techniques, academic writing skills, etc., while you will develop your research plan with your supervisor. On your second year, you will conduct your actual research (data collection, analysis, experiment, writing thesis, etc). Your time to complete your research is limited. Reading several master thesis in your field will also help you to formulate more realistic research plan.

In conclusion, selecting a good research topic is crucial, before you start preparing the research plan; read previous academic papers related to your research topic, and confirm that your research findings are new to the academic world; think about the time frame that you can use to complete your research studies.

(3) Writing a Research Plan

Faculty members of the graduate school you apply will read your research plan to evaluate the significance and potential of your proposed research plan. It is suggested that, at minimum, you include the following elements when you formulate your research plan:

1) Statement of the problem/s

State the critical/problematic situation in your country that you are concerned about from the global or national perspectives, referring to relevant statistics or general information. It is essential that the problem/s should be related to the JDS component you choose.

2) Purpose of your study

Describe what you aim at in your research paper, what you want to identify or prove any hypothesis in your research.

3) Research questions

Describe the questions, as well as sub-questions, which you will address in the research in order to analyse the research topic.

The research question is a key and core of your research plan. It is a question that you will aim to answer in your research paper. So, you should spend more time to develop and elaborate the question.

The research questions should;

- Focus on a single problem/issue
- Be specific, clearly defining its concept
- Be researchable using qualitative/quantitative data
- Be feasible within the given timeframe/constraint
- Be appropriately complex requiring in-depth investigation
- Be relevant in terms of meeting your organizational issue/developmental issue of your country.

4) Rationale

Describe why your research deserves to be conducted by showing how critical the present situation is, what kind of positive socio-economic impacts can be led by your research, how you can contribute to the solution of the critical situation with the results of your research, etc.

5) Methodology

Describe what kinds of methods you will apply for your research; either qualitative or quantitative research methods. If you use qualitative methods, describe who will be possible respondents, how to collect primary data, how to analyse collected data, etc. If quantitative methods, describe what data set will be used, where/how you get the data set, how to analyse, etc.

6) Expected outcome

Describe expected outcome from your research, and how the results will be utilized after your return to your country.

7) How to ensure liability/accuracy and limit (if you can state)

8) Reference

To prove that your problem statement is not based on your own subjective view/opinion, but general/objective fact which has been statistically proved, or stated in the past publication, you must use existing data or someone else's idea. In that occasion, you have to state the source of data and information.

Example

In your text: 'According to Human Development Report (UNDP 2014),....' or 'Based on Sen's "Entitlement Approach" (Sen 1981a, b),'

In the attached references: 'Sen, A. K. 1981a. "Ingredients of Famine Analysis: Availability and Entitlements." Quarterly Journal of Economics, Vol. 95, pp. 433-464.' or 'UNDP. 2014. Human Development Report. UNDP:NY.'

(4) Other check points

After you prepare your research plan, you should check the items below.

- Does your research plan address important policy questions for your country?
- Will your research results contribute towards solving or clarifying policy questions important for your country?
- Does it provide convincing reasons why the research questions described in your research plan are important or will be important in the future? (Try to answer these questions by checking policy discussions and documents as carefully as possible and by finding the important policy questions yet to be resolved)
- Does your research plan show that you are strongly motivated to implement your research successfully?
- Does the research plan show who will benefit from your research results?
- Will your research help you to participate more effectively in the development process of your country, particularly in the policy making process, after your graduation? (Include information about your current responsibilities in the government)
- Is your research plan focused on specific issue rather than vague?
- Is your academic background strong enough to implement your research plan?
- Is your job experience sufficient enough to enhance your research plan during your study?
- Can you contribute for the enrichment of the programme of the graduate school through your research?
- Are you willing to share your academic interest through your research to your co-students and professors?
- Is your research plan written within 700 words?

(5) Confirmation of no plagiarism

Whether you intend or not, plagiarism DOES affect your selection result, because it is an act of academic dishonesty and breach of academic writing ethics.

You are prohibited to 'copy & paste' from articles published in internet / magazines / books whatever written by other people without referring. If you want to use someone else's ideas or work, you have to refer to it by writing all necessary information as data sources. Otherwise, your research plan can be considered as plagiarism, and you might never be admitted to any graduate school. You are strongly recommend to verify your research plan with a plagiarism detection tool before submission.