

ELEMENT NINE



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PRACTICE QUESTIONS FOR PHD ADMISSION INTERVIEW

Please summarise your research proposal for me in a couple of sentences.

Why did you choose to study History, and what makes you want to study for a PhD?

What do you think society can learn from history today? What can historical research tell us about contemporary society?

What is the reason behind the shift from your previous focus on medieval history to the early-modern era? Do you feel you have a sufficient grasp of the period?

It could be argued that ghost beliefs constitute quite a niche topic. What sort of broader relevance do you believe this research might have?

Why did you choose this topic area in particular? What interests you about it?

In what ways do you think your doctoral thesis might advance critical debates in History?

Is your research potentially relevant outside of History? What is the cross-disciplinary potential of this research?

Would you say this project was primarily about religious history, cultural history, or sociology?

Can you summarise for me the main historiographical debates pertaining to ghost beliefs in early-modern Europe?

You reference the work of Kathryn Edwards and P.G. Maxwell-Stuart. How does your research build on what they've published?

What gaps in the literature have you identified, and how would this research fill them?

What's the interaction here, if any, between your research and scholarship on witchcraft and demonology?

What have you chosen England, Scotland and Germany as your case studies? Why these countries?

What is the specific reason you've limited your scope to the hundred-year period spanning 1560 to 1650?

How are you going to compare the differences between Anglican, Calvinist, and Lutheran contexts? Why not include a Catholic country or region in your comparison, also?

How will you handle regional variation in culture and religion – for instance, the differences between the Scottish Lowlands and Highlands?

What's your depth of knowledge regarding early-modern theology?

Have you identified the primary sources you will need to consult and where they're located?

You're intending to study early modern primary sources in English, Scots, and German. What is your knowledge of early-modern dialects in these languages, and how comfortable are you with reading

archaic script? Will you need assistance with translation and transcription, or can you handle this yourself?

What approach will you take to translation? Are you familiar with debates about translation for the purpose of research within Translation Studies?

Will you translate the material before analysing it or analyse it in its original form? How will you represent it to the reader?

Your CV indicates that you've got extensive skills and experience in undertaking quantitative analysis. Do you feel you have the skillset required to shift from quantitative to qualitative research methods?

I can see you've previously completed an MPhil dissertation on celestial phenomena in Bavaria. Are you intending to incorporate any of the methods or data from that into your thesis?

Will you analyse all the primary data together, or will you separate it out for each region? How will you compare them?

How are you going to distinguish between what constitutes a 'ghost' and what ought to be classified as a separate supernatural phenomenon (for example, a demon)?

Why thematic analysis? Why not just apply a historical theory or perspective and take a more holistic, narrative approach to analysis?

What is the relevance of applying a social constructionist approach here? Can you explain the approach to me and why it's useful in this case?

Are you anticipating discovering continuity or discontinuity across the contexts you're studying?

How will you distinguish genuine accounts of ghost beliefs from accounts intended to be fictional or theoretical? How will you distinguish statements of religious belief from folk/superstitious beliefs?

What knowledge of early-modern folklore do you think you will need to fully explore the origins and content of early-modern folk beliefs?

How can you ensure that this project can be completed within a three-year period? If you had to narrow your research, what would you prioritise retaining, and what would you cut?

Are you going to run a pilot study at all? What sort of protocols are you thinking about using for coding and analysis?

How many primary sources do you think you'll admit into thematic analysis? If you don't source enough for it to be statistically meaningful, are you comfortable changing methods?

How committed are you to this specific proposal idea? Are you willing to adapt it in line with our guidance if need be?

Can you give me details about the Corpus Christi Humanities Travel Grant and what you did on your funded research trip to Munich?

What was the topic you wrote about to win the Gemima Fairhurst Scholarship in Late Medieval and Early Modern Studies? Were there many other entries?

Why specifically do you want to study here? Who do you think would make a suitable supervisor? Is this institution your first choice?

What do you want to do after you've finished your PhD? Are you thinking of going into academia? What sort of area would you envisage yourself entering?

I can see you've worked as a seminar tutor previously. Is something you'd like to repeat here? Is that a requirement for you?

We pride ourselves on our high-quality research output. Do you intend to undertake any further research or publish any other articles while you're here? Are there any departmental projects you're interested in contributing to?

To which journals have you submitted your forthcoming publication on celestial phenomena? What's the publication process like? Has it gone through peer review?

What assistance would you need from the faculty and department to complete this research? Would you need any extra funding or assistance?

What funding have you applied for? Have you received any funding offers so far? Are you able to take up the position if you do not receive full funding?

Would you need to work to support yourself throughout your studies? How many hours per week do you think you can commit you working on your thesis?

