

Thesis Prospectus Guidelines

MA Thesis Prospectus Guidelines

Generally speaking, a thesis prospectus should approximate the following outline:

A. Introduction: Statement of Research Problem, Question, Issue

The introductory section of a thesis proposal presents your proposed topic. You should state, as clearly as possible, what your research problem, question, or issue is. To avoid the exclusive use of high-level abstractions, you should give, if need be, several examples of how the problem manifests itself and why the issue is a worthwhile topic for investigation.

B. Review of Scholarship

The literature review provides an examination of scholarly material relevant to your proposed topic. More than just a linear examination of one source after another, a good literature review classifies and evaluates the sources in light of your proposed topic. In other words, this review serves as the context within which you will place your investigation, so you should explain how your assumptions and approach might be different from previous researchers and how your work will further what has already been done. As such, this section can begin to demonstrate what is unique or original about your topic/approach in light of what has already been (or not been) written. And keep in mind that a fully researched and well-written literature review in the proposal can often, with some revision, serve as the literature review in the thesis itself.

C. Significance of the Research

You should explain first *Why* the research project is important and then *How* the project will contribute to the growth of knowledge in your discipline. You should not assume, however, that others will necessarily see and agree that there is a problem to work on. You may have to spell out in detail *Why* and *How* there is, in fact, a problem worthy of investigating and offering a solution. That is, you should state why your issue is significant to the field and what others may gain from your inquiries.

D. Methodology

The methodology section explains how you intend to go about researching your topic: what primary or secondary texts you will examine, major theorists/theories and/or critics/critical traditions you will use. You should be specific in terms of method and expected outcomes.

E. Tentative Organization

In outline form, list chapters with tentative titles and give brief, yet informative, summaries of what you hope to cover in each chapter. The structuring and sequencing of the chapters should unfold in a systematic, logical manner, and you should rely on a larger organizing principle to make your project cohesive. See the library website for specific requirements for your chapters.

F. Preliminary Bibliography

Provide a comprehensive list of works that you plan to read and study critically for this project. You should look for the scholarly "conversation" often signaled within books, articles, and online research sources that various authors are having with previous scholars. You will have already summarized some of these works in your scholarship review, but the preliminary bibliography should be more comprehensive.

G. Expected Timeline for Completing Chapters

You should create a timeline that you will follow for completing the aforementioned chapters. Students should keep in mind that, in order to graduate in spring, their committee will need to receive all chapters well in advance (usually at least a month) of the March 23 deadline; for fall graduation, they will need to provide their committee with complete chapters well in advance of the October 21 deadline for submission.

In general, a complete, well-thought out proposal is usually around 8-10 pages (excluding bibliography).