

Introduction to Dissertation Proposal

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Designed as a quick-reference guide for graduate students

1. What Is a Dissertation Proposal?

Aspect	Description
Purpose	Convince your committee that the planned research is worthwhile, feasible, and methodologically sound.
Audience	Dissertation committee, advisor, and sometimes a departmental review board.
Outcome	Approval (often with minor revisions) ? permission to proceed to full research.
Length	Typically 10–25 pages (varies by program).

2. Core Components

Section	Key Elements	Typical Length
Title Page	Working title, author, program, institution, date	1 page
Abstract	150–250-word summary of problem, objectives, methods, expected contributions	1 paragraph
Introduction	• Background & context • Statement of the problem • Research significance	1–2 pages
Literature Review	• Critical synthesis of relevant scholarship • Identification of gaps • Theoretical framework	3–5 pages
Research Questions / Hypotheses	• Clear, focused, and answerable questions • Optional hypotheses (if quantitative)	½–1 page

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Section	Key Elements	Typical Length
Methodology	• Research design (qualitative, quantitative, mixed) • Data collection methods (e.g., surveys, interviews, archives) • Sampling strategy • Data analysis plan • Ethical considerations	2–4 pages
Preliminary Chapter Outline	• Working structure of the dissertation (chapters & subchapters)	½ page
Timeline / Work Plan	• Gantt chart or milestone table (e.g., literature review, data collection, analysis, writing)	½–1 page
Bibliography	• All sources cited in the proposal, formatted per department style	1–2 pages
Appendices <i>(optional)</i>	• Survey instruments, interview guides, IRB approval letters, etc.	Variable

3. Writing Tips for Each Section

3.1 Title Page & Abstract

- **Title:** Specific, descriptive, and jargon-free. Include key variables or the population if possible.
- **Abstract:** Treat it as a mini-elevator pitch—state the problem, purpose, methods, and anticipated contribution in a logical flow.

3.2 Introduction

- Begin with a **hook** (a striking statistic, anecdote, or gap) to capture interest.
- Clearly articulate **why** the problem matters to the field and/or society.
- End with a concise **purpose statement** that leads into the research questions.

3.3 Literature Review

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- Organize thematically or chronologically, not just as a list of summaries.
- Use **critical appraisal**: note strengths, weaknesses, and methodological limitations of prior work.
- Conclude with a **gap statement** that justifies your study.

3.4 Research Questions / Hypotheses

- Use **SMART** criteria: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound.
- If you have multiple questions, group them under **primary** and **secondary** headings.

3.5 Methodology

- **Justify** each methodological choice (e.g., “A mixed-methods design is chosen because it allows triangulation of ...”).
- Include a **pilot** or **pre-test**