



General Guidelines for Writing a M.A. Thesis Proposal

Your proposal should be a coherent, carefully constructed road map for your thesis.

Each thesis committee will consist of at least three persons. As you progress in the program you should consider *whom*, exactly, you will want to serve on this panel. It is important that you choose someone with whom you can work closely to serve as the *chair* of your project.

Assembling a committee is straightforward: you ask three particular faculty if they will serve as readers for your thesis. If they answer yes, you will provide each of them with a form to sign indicating their approval. The form for your committee chair is different from the ones for your other members. Be sure you obtain all forms from the graduate coordinator in the department main office.

Once you establish a committee, you will need to schedule a “proposal defense” with them. In this meeting, you will discuss the rationale for your historical approach. Your committee members will then offer advice/suggestions for constructing a well-researched, analytically sound, and coherent thesis. *As a matter of courtesy, you should give the committee your proposal at least two weeks in advance of the defense date.*

The following are general guidelines about producing a good proposal:

I. Establish the Historical Problem (about 1-2 pages)

In this section, you will sketch the contours of the historical problem that you plan to research. What is the historical context of your topic? Who are the main actors, organizations, etc.? You are setting the background for your thesis.

II. Current State of Knowledge on the Topic (about 2-3 pages)

Here you will provide a brief historiographic overview of your topic. What are some of the key works and interpretations on your topic? What are the major debates among historians who have previously studied this issue? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the existing literature? Where does your work fit into this literature—are you developing an entirely new thesis, revising an existing one, or filling a gap in the current historiography?

III. Methods and Sources (about 2-3 pages)

In this section, you do two things: describe the primary sources you plan to use and establish *your theoretical or methodological approach*. In discussion primary sources, let the committee members know if you are using newspapers, memoirs, official documents, novels, speeches, etc. What are the strength and weaknesses of each source?

In terms of methodologies and theoretical perspectives, what form of analysis you plan to use? Is it cultural, social, or political history? Do you use an analysis based on gender, race, class, etc.? You should mention any scholars who have influenced your approach.

IV. Chapter Outline (2-3 pages)

List the title and/or subtitle for each chapter

Outline the content for each chapter

Provide a rationale for the content of each chapter

Explain the rationale for your organization (chronological, thematic, etc.)

Discuss the key sources for each chapter