

Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies
Guidelines for Doctoral Dissertation Proposals

General Goal:

The purpose of the thesis proposal is to enable you to clearly define your research question[s] and the approach you intend to take to your project. Note that research at the doctoral level is always going to be open to development, so the final thesis may not end up reflecting the proposal in each and every detail. Nonetheless, the proposal should give a well-defined account of the project that will convince the faculty that your proposed research is feasible, that you are ready to engage in the research, and are engaging important questions that will propel the academic conversation in which it engages forward.

While length is less important than content, typically, the text of the proposal should be approximately twenty to twenty five pages (or around 7,500-9,500 words), including a bibliography, which should follow a standard, consistent academic format.

Outline of Thesis Proposal:

Though there will be discipline-specific variations, wherever possible, a thesis proposal should contain the following:

1) A Title: Choose a title that succinctly captures the topic of your dissertation. At this stage, the title is tentative and can be changed at a later date.

1) A *Fragestellung* (statement of problem): Precisely what problem do you intend to solve (or what issue[s] do you intend to address)? Justify the importance of your dissertation. Why is it significant to the academic field in your discipline? What will we know that we did not know before? What is the range of possible solutions for the problem (or conclusions with respect to the issue[s])? Do you have a working hypothesis?

2) A *Forschungsgeschichte* (history of research): What previous attempts have been made to solve problems of this type (or to address the issue[s] in question)? Were these attempts successful or unsuccessful? Can any of them serve as a model for your research? If so, how? If not, why not? This may be the largest portion of the proposal, though the length of this section will depend on the research field itself. Moreover, depending on the state of research in your topic area, the focus of this summary may be around the specific research question you are posing or around a more general question.

3) A description of the data and a discussion of critical methodology: What data are relevant to solving the problem? Which data will support and which will undermine the various possible solutions (or conclusions)? Approximately how much is there? How much of it will you be examining? What data will you be excluding from your study and why? What methods are you using to solve your problem? Why are these methods best suited to address your problem? What obstacles need to be overcome?

4) A plan of work: What work is involved in gathering the data and analyzing it? If possible, the work should be broken down into a series of ordered steps. Some of the steps may be contingent on

the results of a previous step.

5) Table of Contents: The proposal should contain a projected table of contents with brief descriptions of the contents of each chapter.

6) A discussion of your qualifications: What training is needed to carry out the project successfully? How much of this training have you already acquired and how much will be acquired on the job?

7) A Working Bibliography: The bibliography should list the primary and secondary sources that you will rely on in your work. It is understood that you will grow and amend your bibliography as you progress in your work.