

Thesis Proposal Guidelines

(Doctoral Theses in Music Theory, Musicology, and Music Education)

Purpose of a Thesis Proposal

The purpose of a thesis proposal is to demonstrate: 1) that you have identified a significant research problem; and 2) that you have sufficient background to equip you to investigate the problem. Your proposal should persuade your readers (generally, your supervisor and second reader) of two things:

- The research question(s) that you propose to investigate are significant, and answering them will make an original contribution to knowledge in the field. You demonstrate this by locating your proposed topic within the context of the literature of the field, showing that on the one hand the topic is important, but on the other hand that no one has answered precisely the questions that you propose to ask.
- You have described your methodology and theoretical framework in sufficient detail that your committee can tell what you plan to do and can judge whether the evidence you expect to find or generate or collect is appropriate to the questions that you plan to investigate.

Remember that the purpose of the proposal is to persuade your committee that you are ready to embark on the thesis. You are not expected to know exactly what you will discover. It is almost inevitable that there will be changes in your research design as the project evolves—some material may be unavailable, you may discover that an unanticipated factor requires you to make a change to some element in your research design or to your theoretical framework, or an unexpected observation may send you back to the literature. The proposal is a stepping-stone on the path to completion.

Discuss with your supervisor the relationship between the proposal and the final thesis and a timeline for completing the thesis by the appropriate deadline.

Format and Length of a Thesis Proposal

The thesis proposal should consist of the following:

- An essay in which you:
 - clearly identify your research question(s)
 - provide an explanation of the need for your study
 - explain your planned methodology
 - explain the significance of your project (how it makes a new contribution to knowledge)
- A sample Table of Contents and a paragraph or so describing the contents of each chapter
- A preliminary bibliography

Your proposal should be as succinct as possible while satisfying the requirements above. For most types of research, a PhD dissertation proposal need be no longer than about 20 double-spaced pages.

There is no single set pattern for writing a thesis proposal. The structure, style, content, and length will appropriately vary depending on the research question(s) and methodology. Discuss with your supervisor the question of appropriate format for your proposal.

For Research Using Human Subjects or Participants

- Include some or all of the following, as appropriate:
 - Protocols such as survey instruments, interview schedules, formats, or instructions for subjects of experiments.
 - Release forms for interviews
 - Instructions or explanations for recruiting or informing subjects or participants
 - Statements about how you intend to handle, archive, or report the data in such a way as to safeguard the confidentiality of participants.
- Consult with the Office of Research Ethics for further information (<https://uwo.ca/research/ethics/human/index.html>).

Tips for Writing a Thesis Proposal

- Consult with your Supervisor.
- Learn the required guidelines for the style and format of the thesis and follow these guidelines in your proposal. Use a style manual appropriate for the research community you are addressing (e.g., Chicago Manual of Style, American Psychological Association, etc.).
- Read other people's proposals, especially those that use approaches or methods similar to your own.