

DMA Thesis Proposal Guidelines

Purpose of a Thesis Proposal

(The term *thesis* is a generic term that represents a document such as a Master's thesis, PhD dissertation, or DMA monograph that marks the final requirement for a graduate degree.)

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 (DMA Monograph) Proposal

The topic of a DMA monograph should be one relating to some aspect of performance on your instrument, perhaps one relating to its repertoire or pedagogy. Ideally, you should draw from Essay 2 of your Comprehensive Examination, clarifying the research question and presenting a clearly viable scope and organization for your monograph.

The monograph proposal should consist of an essay of approximately 15-20 pages in which you:

- Clearly identify your research question.
- Provide an explanation of the need for your study. This section should include a review of relevant literature.

- Explain your planned methodology. That is, explain how you will gather the information and knowledge you will need.
- Explain the significance of your project. How does it make a new contribution to knowledge?
- Include a sample Table of Contents and a paragraph or so describing the contents of each chapter.
- Include a preliminary bibliography.

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 previous students' proposals, if possible, especially those that use approaches or methods similar to your own.