

# PROSPECTUS GUIDELINES

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History graduate students seeking to write an MA Thesis (or MA Non-Thesis Essay) and PhD students writing a Doctoral Dissertation, are expected to write a Prospectus in collaboration with their Supervisor. Doctoral students must gain final approval of the Prospectus from their Committee. The prospectus should go through several drafts in collaboration with your Supervisor; doctoral students in particular should make various drafts available to appropriate Committee members. Ideally, a polished draft should be in the hands of the Committee 10 days in advance of the Qualifying Exam Oral. The format is outlined below. It must be typed, double-spaced, and should be approximately 7-10 pages in length, not including Outline and Bibliography.

## I. COVER PAGE – FINAL FORM:

- A. Tentative Title; your name, date, etc.
- B. Signature of Supervising Professor
- C. Signatures of each Committee Member, including outside representative(s), as appropriate.

II. SINGLE PARAGRAPH SUMMARY: There is no better challenge than to reduce your entire thesis to a crisp and elegant paragraph. This paragraph will state your thesis, objectives, and provide a roadmap of your argument and evidence, that is, the structure of your work.

III. THE PROSPECTUS: The Prospectus provides a clear but sometimes tentative working statement about your research topic. It should contain an explanation of the larger historical concerns which make your topic valuable and engaging. You should also outline and discuss issues raised by your work. The Prospectus is more than a tentative roadmap. It should include a working statement of your expectations as well as possible findings and conclusions. The Prospectus should include the following:

A. INTRODUCTION: Background to your topic; describe your subject briefly, place it in historical context; state its significance to the larger historical and historiographic issue(s).

B. Thesis Statement & Objectives: Identify the issue, problem, or question; provide your thesis statement. List and discuss your objectives, that is, what you wish to achieve. Although the Prospectus is best viewed as a working document, it offers an important opportunity to clarify the reasons for your interest in the topic and to present tentative conclusions. The ritual of giving your thesis statement, objectives, and an outline is to assist you in clarifying your position. The standard mantra of historical writing can hardly be avoided: Thesis; Objectives; Structure (= Argument & Evidence); Outcome & Significance.

C. HISTORIOGRAPHY: The Prospectus should situate your work in various traditions; this will involve surveying the historiography of your topic. Historiography is important; it should help frame the issues discussed in the Prospectus and in turn address the question of how it relates and contributes to earlier traditions and existing studies. What does your study offer—new material, new perspectives, new questions? Can you answer the harsh question: So, what?

D. BODY - STRUCTURE: Discuss in a structured and detailed narrative how the argument and evidence will unfold. This narrative should be guided by the “mantra” outlined above and by your outline (Part IV) below. In following your outline, this narrative may be divided into sections devoted to each chapter. Include specific references to your likely sources. List and evaluate the primary and major secondary sources to be used. Be as specific as possible.

IV. WORKING OUTLINE: A tentative outline is central to your Prospectus. Follow a consistent outline format. Aim at providing a ‘big picture’ without too many parts. If your thesis or dissertation will have six chapters, for example, your outline will have six major headings. Think carefully about the number of chapters and how each is related. The purpose of the outline is to impress a reasonable and persuasive form on the issues and the materials that you have researched. The purpose of the Prospectus is to assist you and your committee in focusing the issues and questions that drew you to the topic from the outset. Although tentative, your Outline should represent your best effort at this point in time. Pay particular attention to scope and breadth (most early outlines are overly ambitious); gaps; sequence and connections (both chronological

and thematic); transitions (between chapters). Think carefully about joining existing chapters; deleting existing chapters; adding possible chapters, etc. As a ritual for thinking, it is highly recommended that you outline your thesis anew on a regular basis. Reevaluate what you wish to say and how you want your readers to understand it.

V. BIBLIOGRAPHY: The Prospectus contains a working Bibliography. It should be divided into Primary & Secondary sources. Your Supervisor and your Committee will assist you in developing and expanding the sources. Keep your Working Bibliography up to date. Establish the proper format from the outset; make sure your citations are correct—do it once and it will serve you in the future.

VI. TIMETABLE: This should appear as a “bullet-list” of dates. List all formal deadlines from the University, College, and Department. In addition, list agreed target dates for completing Drafts and Final Submissions for each chapter, etc. Discuss your timetable with your Supervisor. Make certain ample time is allotted for distributing, reading, correcting, and re-writing your work. Remember that your readers must be provided reasonable time to assist as you draft and re-write your chapters—most importantly, the final submitted form. Writing is a ritual for thinking, good writing is re-written writing. If you have something to say, it likely will bring moments of self-doubt and useful confusion. If you find writing easy and fun, see a doctor immediately.

As a guideline, an absolute minimum of ten days lead-time should be given for faculty to read and comment on a single chapter; in all cases, no hard and fast rule exists: turn-around time with individual faculty must be reasonable and mutually agreed. The final phase is the most important. When the several chapters come together, things sometimes change. The penultimate draft of the entire work should be available to Committee Members no less than two weeks in advance of the Oral Defense. Again, no hard and fast rule, except this: It is your obligation to communicate regularly with Committee members; it is your job to coordinate respective timetables.

Communication and punctuality are critical ingredients in graduate work. Get help when you feel the need. In the meantime, take responsibility for your work by exercising good time management and personal discipline.

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