

How to Write a Senior Thesis Proposal

A “prospectus” is a short description of your proposed senior thesis, from one page to five pages long, plus a bibliography of books, articles, documentaries, and other sources you have consulted or plan to consult. Your prospectus should clearly describe your thesis topic, the form your thesis will take, and how you will reach your thesis goals. For a research-based, analytical or empirical senior thesis, your prospectus should focus on your governing question or hypothesis, your research methods, and your theoretical or methodological framework. For a creative thesis or project-based thesis, your prospectus should focus on what you plan to do and why this project is important to you and relevant for your major. Because you need to do some background research in order to determine a relevant and feasible thesis topic, your prospectus should include a bibliography of works you have consulted or plan to consult for your senior thesis. It will take initial research and thought to develop a *focused* topic. The following eight questions can be used as a framework for writing your own senior thesis prospectus.

1. Do you have a *preliminary* TITLE for your senior thesis?
2. What is your focused thesis TOPIC? How is this topic of interest to you or of interest to other scholars or researchers in your field? Why is this topic relevant, important, or interesting?
3. What central QUESTION will your research or project seek to answer? (Alternately, you may pose a hypothesis.)
4. What FORM will your thesis take?
 - Research-based paper
 - Empirical or observational research in a lab or other setting
 - Creative work (visual art, poetry, performance, recital, etc)
 - Project of my own design (documentary film, event, community activism, etc)
 - Project based on a documented internship
 - Some combination of the above
- 5 a. If you will be writing a research-based paper or doing empirical or observational research, which RESEARCH METHODS and RESEARCH RESOURCES will you use? Possibilities include library research, archival research, observational research, surveys, interviews, analysis of public records (such as maps or census records), and specific laboratory methods.
- 5 b. If you will be doing a project or creative work, please DESCRIBE in detail what your project or work will involve, what the outcome or result will be, and how you will incorporate research-based analysis into your final report or artist’s statement.
6. How will you place your research, creative work, or project into the theoretical or practical context of research in your major?
7. Have you done some background research to see if anyone has done research or completed a project similar to yours? What distinguishes your proposed project or research from earlier ones similar to it? Do you have a bibliography of works you have consulted or plan to consult? (If you have a preliminary bibliography, attach it to your prospectus.)
8. Who will be your primary thesis advisor? Have you asked this person to be your advisor yet? If you have not yet asked any professor to advise your project or thesis, list two or three people you hope to have on your committee.

Check with your major department to see if it offers its own senior thesis prospectus format for your major and to find out if a proposal is required and when it is due.