Graduate Thesis and Dissertation Proposals
Rhetoric and Composition Concentration

This document prepares you to write an M.A. thesis or Ph.D. dissertation. The document proposes a research project that will require a specific methodology (for example, historical, theoretical, textual/linguistic/visual rhetorical analysis, discourse analysis, teacher research, archival, case study, mixed methods). Sections vary in length and scope, depending on the project. Empirical theses may require a longer methods section, for example, while archival research may need a longer justification for the collections required and research conducted.

The research proposal should do the following:

• Introduce the focus and importance of the research
• Explain research objects, questions and/or hypotheses
• Define limitations or variables for inquiry, if appropriate
• Review the relevant literature for the topic
• Indicate the method for research
• Provide details of the study set-up, including texts, setting, participants and timing
• Discuss researcher role
• Discuss data collection methods and their relation to variables, if appropriate
• Include human subjects approval forms, if appropriate, by filing forms with the research office
• Outline data analysis strategies

Typical research proposals for a major project are 10-40 pages in length. Students should expect to conduct research into the background of their topic as well as into the methodology chosen. Note: ENGL 8125, “Survey of Research Methods” offers the opportunity to develop a proposal as part of the course.

The M.A. Thesis Proposal

Introduction
   Explain the focus and object(s) of the research
   List research questions and hypotheses / problem statement / outline of information
   Suggest importance of the research to your field

Literature Review
   Analyze the relevant theoretical, historical and/or current literature
   Use thematic organization or break into sections if necessary
   Cite all sources in APA or MLA format and provide a complete bibliography

Methodology
   Indicate the method for research (for example, historical, theoretical, textual/linguistic/visual rhetorical analysis, discourse analysis, teacher research, archival, case study, mixed methods)
   Cite models for these methods as appropriate
   Discuss researcher role
   Provide details of the study set-up, including primary texts, setting, participants and timing, as appropriate
   Discuss data collection methods, justifications, and their relation to variables, if appropriate

Attachments
   Attachments to proposals often include data collection prompts and instruments, interview and survey questions, data analysis details, copies of primary research materials, visuals, participant profiles, and human subjects forms, if necessary.
The PhD Dissertation Proposal

For a Ph.D. dissertation, the proposal includes the same items as for the M.A. thesis, but offers a much more substantial and comprehensive literature review and bibliography, and often a more detailed methodology section. Ph.D. proposals should also include a detailed chapter outline. Specific requirements for proposal sections will be decided in consultation with your Dissertation Advisor.

Human Subjects

Please note that all studies involving human subjects such as teacher research—even those you anticipate as exempt—must be submitted to the research office well in advance of data collection and analysis. Go to the Research Office website to begin your approval.

Such research also requires written permission forms signed by all participants. Sample permission forms are available on the GSU research office.

Sample Process and Timeline

Each student has a committee with a director and two other readers for their thesis or dissertation. An additional forth reader or outside reader may also be included. Note that proposals are typically completed and approved by the committee the semester before you begin to write the thesis or dissertation. Here is a sample semester timeline for developing the proposal:

1. Week 1: Find and request an Advisor
2. Week 3: Submit one-page research concept and identify / request committee members
3. Week 7: Introduction and Lit. Review completed
4. Week 9: Methodology completed. Meet with Advisor to review bibliography
5. Week 11: Draft Proposal completed and circulated for feedback from Advisor / committee
6. Week 14: Present final proposal to committee for approval
7. Week 16: Proposal due to English Graduate Studies Office

Thesis deadlines are published by the College for each semester.

The following steps may be helpful in organizing your proposal process.

1. Brainstorm initial research questions and target specific study types
2. Identify proposal purpose and audience in your field
3. Select objects of analysis/ texts/ setting to observe
4. Conduct literature search on previous topic-related studies, similar method studies, methodology, measurements, granting agencies, etc.
5. Refine research questions
6. Decide on study type/method
7. Apply for Human Subjects Approval from the Research Office, if required.
8. Draft proposal
9. Obtain review of proposal (peer review, advisor, committee, select researchers)
10. Revise proposal
11. Make presentation notes for committee

For more information, sample proposals and bibliographies, see www.rhetcomp.gsu.edu