

WRITING YOUR DISSERTATION PROSPECTUS

A dissertation prospectus is a paradoxical piece of writing. It is not an abstract (which is to say, a summary of a completed dissertation) or an introductory chapter .

Since it is meant to be submitted soon after completion of the candidacy examination, it need not be a huge document. This section carries the weight and should be done with much thought and consideration of the topic and the questions you are looking forward to answering. My remodeled dissertation topic felt like a much better fit, and allowed me to salvage the questions from my original project in a more compelling way. The order of the prospectus should be as follows: The topic of your prospectus- this is basically what the document is all about. I used research papers and course assignments during my first two years of the PhD to try out versions of my dissertation question on a small scale. Here are some important formatting rules: Go through the guidelines provided by your advisor to ensure that your research has captured all the areas outlined. Has this topic been treated before? I was really glad I had kept all of those random letters, photographs, web pages, journal articles, and newspaper clippings. By January 13 candidates will submit a page written prospectus to the graduate coordinator that forms the basis of the presentation. Has new evidence appeared for example, a new primary source since previous treatments? Dissertation Prospectus Body A dissertation prospectus is a paradoxical piece of writing. Therefore, the dissertation writer is encouraged to show drafts of the prospectus to his or her dissertation committee and other faculty members. State clearly and concisely how you presently conceive this problem and how you suppose it can be resolved. Indeed, it could be around fifteen double-spaced pages in length roughly words with up to ten further pages of bibliography. Thinking about why someone might find my dissertation compelling enough to fund it forced me to be really clear with myself about my contributions to existing scholarship, and explicit about which archival sources I needed and how I planned to use them. The prospectus should include a select bibliography and the names of archives in which research will be conducted. Thus, it is prudent to take your time and go through your work over and over again before submitting it. Format your work just like you would any type of research paper- standard font should be used that is visible, use one-inch margins and double-spaced text. Precision and accuracy- avoid unnecessary grammatical and sentence structure errors that you can easily avoid. It is not necessary to criticize specific failings; but show what is understood to be the merits and limitations of relevant works. Do not be afraid of pouring out your heart and mind as there is room for formatting to erase anything that is irrelevant and out of context. Students who do so successfully by September 30 of the fifth year will receive the full Dissertation Fellowship retroactively. I realized that my original dissertation question would work really well as a single chapter in this new project. You might opt for software like Zotero , a simple Dropbox folder, or even a designated notebook or desk drawer where you stash notecards. Make the content as comprehensive as possible to the target audience get your whole idea. I started shuffling all of these questions and materials around, stitching them together into a coherent project. If the major sections of your dissertation seem likely to exceed this length, plan to subdivide them. Just put your thoughts together and start writing. But when it came time to fulfill the final phase of the candidacy process “ writing and defending the dissertation prospectus ” I found fewer resources here but found these two especially useful. For students who are off-cycle those whose fifth year of matriculation begins in January , the corresponding deadlines described above will be December 15 and February Bibliography List the primary and secondary sources used to develop the prospectus. The committee will then meet collectively with the candidate to discuss the project and its implementation. The prospectus is not a mini-dissertation, and need not involve more time in writing and revising than another paper of comparable length. I made a list of all of the questions and sub-topics I still found fascinating. As indicated, the prospectus should provide a preliminary description of the proposed dissertation. Talking about writing can be more helpful than writing. It is important that the problem and hypothetical answers be stated from the outset, so that your research will not risk becoming random, and your exposition will not lapse into mere description. Think about method and theory, even if there is a decision not to engage much with external perspectives and theory. Yet enough care and stylistic grace should be exercised so that the prospectus clearly and concisely articulates the project, its arguments, methods, and special considerations in a manner that anyone in interdisciplinary studies can grasp. I had been setting myself up for

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this project all along.