

Guidelines for writing the research proposal and MA thesis

Research proposal

The research proposal (aka exposé) is the backbone of your MA thesis. It should be used as a basis for your thesis. Its aim is to show that you have planned your study well and that you have a clear idea of the objective(s) of your research project and the ways of achieving those; that you are aware of possible difficulties/problems, and that you know how to tackle them. Put simply, a proposal presents the **what**, **why** and **how** of your future study. A proposal should be between 3.000 and 4.000 words long (excluding bibliography/references and any appendices). Format: A4-page, Times New Roman, 12pt font size, 2.5 cm margins, 1.5-spaced.

Think about the following:

- What do you plan to do in your study, and how (topic, research focus, theory, methodology, data, analysis)? Try to choose a relevant topic for your profile area with a clear rationale.
- Why do you want to carry out the study or research project (motivation, need for this research, research gap / open questions or controversies)? Draw up 2-4 research questions.
- What do you plan/expect to find out, considering potential preliminary results/findings? Draw up one or more hypotheses if applicable.
- What do/will the findings mean (interpretation, conclusion)? Or, in case you analyse literary texts or films: What will be the topics, themes, perspectives that guide your analysis, or what will be your main argumentative line?
- Do you expect any obstacles and challenges related to your research?

How to write a research proposal

- Briefly describe your research project; i.e. the topic, research focus, theoretical approach.
- Present a brief research literature review, possibly with gaps in previous research, present your research question(s) and hypotheses (if applicable); show how your study will help in filling the gaps (if applicable).
- **For Linguistics (including multimodal linguistics), Language Learning and Teaching, Cultural History:** Inform on your research methodology, methods of data collection (incl. sampling and instruments) and time frame (if applicable); present your data, e.g. corpus and/or experimental data. Present expected or preliminary results/findings of your study and discuss/interpret those (if applicable). Use relevant research methods literature to justify your choices.
- **For Literary and Cultural Studies, Cultural History (including film analysis):** Briefly describe your selected works, why you chose them, and how they form a research corpus together (a common denominator).
- Inform on potential problems if applicable (e.g. with individual issues, theory or methodology, ethical considerations, anticipated challenges and limitations).
- Provide a (preliminary) list of references (i.e. a select bibliography).

MA thesis

The MA thesis is basically a substantial extension of the proposal plus the presentation of research and analysis in the main part. Structure your MA thesis as follows:

1. Introduction (description of topic and research focus; its context and relevance for research in the respective field, e.g. gaps or controversies; possibly research questions and hypothesis)
2. Theoretical approach/framework (if applicable) and review of the pertinent research literature
3. Methodological design, procedures of data collection and methods of analysis, with justification and reference to relevant research methods literature (if applicable); include your annotation or coding scheme in the text or appendix (if applicable); include your data set or corpus, either on a USB stick or in the University's online repository NextCloud.
4. Historical, cultural, contextual background for your study (if applicable)

Note: Sections 1-4 should take up no more than approx. 1/3 of your whole thesis.

5. Main Part (can be subdivided into several subsections)

For Linguistics (including multimodal linguistics), Language Learning and Teaching, Cultural History:

- analyses that are clearly documented in a transparent way with reference to relevant research methods and theories; include the annotated data set or syntax of your statistical analyses, either in the appendix or online in NextCloud
- description and analysis of the results of the research, using descriptive and inferential statistics if suitable and necessary
- interpretation and discussion of the findings in the light of the research questions and hypotheses.

For Literary and Cultural Studies, Cultural History (including film analysis):

- divide into subsections according to topics, perspectives, themes with which you read the works
- analyses of works that are clearly documented with reference to relevant research approaches and theories and with reference to your research questions
- address also narratological aspects or aspects of film techniques and their effects for the reader/viewer; address possible criticism of the text.

Note: This is your major research/analysis and should take up approx. 2/3 of your whole thesis, including the conclusion.

6. Conclusion (summarize your arguments and research findings, reflect on challenges/limitations of the study, give possible view as to further research on this topic)

General Advice:

- The MA thesis should be approx. between 60 and 80 pages long, excluding bibliography/references and appendices (if applicable). Format: A4-page, Times New Roman 12 pt. font size, 2.5 cm margins, 1.5-spaced.
- Please consult your supervisors if there is a minimum number of required sources and/or special formatting and notation conventions (the profile areas have different style sheets). **Format according to the style sheet of your profile area. Pay attention to the respective referencing and notation conventions and bibliographical style. Use this style consistently!**
- Carefully proofread the whole thesis, do not allow any typos or outright lexico-grammatical errors. A high level of academic English and a clean form is most important beside intelligent and informed argumentation and research!
- **Consult your supervisor on whether and what kind of AI use is permitted. If permitted, carefully document all AI use!**