

Department of Linguistics
Guidelines for the Thesis Prospectus

The Thesis Prospectus is prepared by the student as part of the Candidacy Portfolio and is intended to describe for the Examining Committee the nature of the proposed Doctoral Thesis research and should normally include these labeled sections: **(1) Background, (2) Research Questions/Thesis Statement, (3) Methodology, (4) Outcomes/Contribution, (5) Timeline** and **(6) References**. The Prospectus is not intended to be a long document—generally, it is between 20 to 40 double-spaced pages long, including references, tables, figures and appendices. The exact length and content of the Prospectus may vary according to subdiscipline or supervisor, and will also depend on the exact nature of the research involved. However, it should be remembered that the Prospectus is largely a “throwaway” document—with the exception of the literature review and the references, very little of the Prospectus will be used after Candidacy in the actual dissertation.

The Prospectus should generally cover the following topics:

1. **Background:** Brief introduction to the topic (What are you looking at? Why is this interesting?); Literature review (What research already exists on this topic? Where is the gap in knowledge? What is the motivation for further research on this topic — theoretical? empirical? What do you expect to find that will be new?); Theoretical framework.
2. **Research Questions/Thesis Statement:** Questions, predictions, hypotheses, or problem statements.
3. **Methodology:** An outline of your methodology/argumentation and the work you have done on the topic to date. For a traditional thesis, this section will cover the entire thesis. For a paper-based thesis, this section can be divided into sub-sections for individual papers.
4. **Outcomes/Contributions:** A summary of what you expect to find, why it is significant, and what it would mean if you got negative/unexpected results.
5. **Timeline:** A timeline for the proposed research, with some breakdown for tasks. This is important for the committee to judge the feasibility of the proposed research.
6. **References:** A list of references mentioned in the prospectus (given in a consistent bibliographic style).

Depending on the subdiscipline and topic, the content of these sections might be different, or the section itself might be unnecessary. Some supervisors might require additional sections and material (e.g., a CV or samples of experimental instruments).

Students (and supervisors) should remember that the Prospectus itself is not being examined at Candidacy, and that the Prospectus is intended only to explain the student’s research goals so that the Examining Committee is better able to assess the student’s readiness to undertake doctoral research. The Prospectus should set out the research program clearly and should “sell” the topic to the Committee as well as it can, but ultimately it is the performance of the student during the Oral Examination that determines advancement. Students (and supervisors) should allocate the time dedicated to writing the Prospectus accordingly.