

Proposal or Prospectus Formats

PLEASE NOTE: You must find out from your committee chairperson the exact specifications for what should be included in your proposal. This could depend on guidelines from your college, your department, your program, or even your own advisor. The following are *general* guidelines that may be helpful in this process, if you have no other specific guidelines.

A. For the traditional five chapter format thesis/dissertation

A formal proposal is typically the first three chapters of the thesis or dissertation. Done perfectly, all you would have to do is change all the future tense to past tense in Chapter 3. This never happens. Things change, things go wrong, new information comes to light, etc. Plus, your committee may suggest changes at the prospectus meeting. So, you almost certainly will need to go back and revise your proposal, particularly Chapter 3, to be a more accurate reflection of what you actually did.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Some departments don't require a complete three chapters. Others have explicit directions for what should be included. Some require a pre-prospectus meeting, while others do not. It is up to you to check that you are doing what is expected in YOUR program.

B. For the manuscript format thesis/dissertation

This is a bit more complicated, because there is no absolute standard for what must be included. You will certainly need to negotiate this with your chair and your committee to be sure you are all in agreement. However, some general guidelines may apply.

Overview of the final product. As was evident from Dean DePauw's memo, chapters 1 and 5 of the final document are very similar to the ones in the traditional format. Chapter 2 is an optional literature review, which could also be very similar to the traditional format OR it could be written as a publishable review. If so, then it needs to be more structured and in keeping with published research reviews in your field. Chapters 3 and 4 are formatted as two publishable articles, so they have to include all relevant sections, as they would be submitted to a journal. Chapter 5 would be a summary of the whole project, bringing together the findings from the two articles and tying them to the original objectives from Chapter 1.

Overview of proposal. The proposal would include Chapter 1, which gives the overview of the whole project and could be very similar to the traditional format. Chapter 2 would be a literature review, and Chapter 3 would be a methods chapter that blueprints the actual steps for the study and includes brief descriptions of what will be included in each publishable quality article.

One big difference between the proposals for the two formats is that *in the traditional format*, the proposal is essentially the first three chapters of the dissertation, while *in the alternative, manuscript format*, the proposal and the final product would not be the same, except possibly for chapters 1 and 2.