

## Dissertation Prospectus Requirements

(added to Graduate Handbook, Jan 2025)

This section presents guidelines for what is minimally acceptable for a prospectus that is ready to defend. In consultation with your dissertation supervisor, you can present a prospectus that goes beyond these guidelines.

Please plan to present your prospectus to your full committee **at least two weeks before** the date of your agreed-upon defense. Before this, your chair should have received your prospectus in draft form to provide feedback before the rest of the committee receives your full prospectus.

Your dissertation should be based on an analysis **you conduct yourself**. You should follow traditional social science conventions for the format (i.e., using Strunk and White's Elements of Style Guidelines, citations in APA format, and use Headings and Subheadings throughout where appropriate). This means that your prospectus should include the following sections highlighted in bold. Your prospectus should be between 25-30 pages but may be longer if needed.

**Introduction:** The introduction should include a clear statement of the research problem and a project summary. This introduction should provide a rationale for your study and explain why your study is important to the literature. This section “sets the stage” for your research questions, and you should incorporate them into the Introduction. (**2 pages max**).

**Literature Review:** The purpose of the literature review is to explain past relevant research that situates your project within the context of that canon. The literature review shows why your study is essential and should give your readers enough background knowledge to understand your dissertation. It should also explain why your research is necessary. The literature review is best understood as an *extension* of your argument for your dissertation. Where possible, the literature review should discuss the foundational and seminal research on your theory and topic and synthesize the current research most similar to your research. It should **not** be a summary. Instead, a literature review should synthesize old and new literature relevant to your research. Peer-reviewed research should be used in the literature review. Students may include a short theory development section at the end of the Literature Review if needed. (**10-12 pages max**)

**Data and Methodology:** This section will discuss how you will conduct your study. Sub-sections in this section will vary depending on the complexity of your project. In general, this section should include information about participants, research design (including any treatment groups), all data collection instruments (and process in creating them), and secondary data your project will use, what method will be used to analyze the data (i.e., some literature might be needed to support why you have chosen a particular method here as well), and what IRB needs your project requires. You may find adding an appendix to your prospectus useful if you intend to create a survey instrument, use an interview protocol, have a field observation for your project, or any other data collection process for your dissertation.

Questions to ask while writing this section:

1. Why is your data adequate to answer your research question(s)?

2. How will you collect your data, and why are you collecting it that way?
3. What possible arguments can be made against the internal or external validity of your data?
4. What are the limitations of your chosen data?
5. How have you verified that your secondary data (if used) is sound?
6. How will you analyze your data? (i.e., Triangulation/Mixed-Method, Quantitative, Qualitative?)
7. What statistical method (if applicable) will you use? Why is that method appropriate?

The point of the data and methods section is to allow your committee to fully understand your data and method so that they can verify your method is acceptable. If you need IRB clearance for your project, you should begin drafting those materials and be prepared to share them with your committee when supplying your prospectus. **(7-10 pages max)**

**Chapter Outline and Project Timeline:** Include a chapter outline at the end of your prospectus with a brief description of what will be included in each chapter. If you are writing a **three-paper/article** dissertation, each “chapter” should describe the research questions/hypotheses to be answered in each article/chapter. **Three-paper/article** dissertations should have a concluding chapter tying together observations drawn from each paper. **Traditional** dissertation chapters typically follow this format: Introduction, Literature Review/Theory, Methods and Data, Data Analysis Chapter(s), and a Concluding chapter. **(2-3 pages max)**

**Reference List:** All prospectuses should include a Works Cited section listing all bibliographic sources you used in your study.

Please refer to the university’s [dissertation formatting guidelines](#) before drafting the prospectus. Starting a folder with each piece of the dissertation now will save you a lot of time later down the line. This handy [checklist](#) is also helpful once you have defended the dissertation in its entirety.

### Frequently Asked Questions

1. **I have a three-paper article dissertation. The substantive chapters will have co-authors. How do I handle this in my dissertation?**
  - a. ANSWER: All students incorporating publications that were a collaborative effort of co-researchers or co-authors must include an Attributions page within their front matter, regardless of whether that work is already published. This section should mention the specific contributions of each author of each publication, including the author of the dissertation, for each published chapter. A few sentences per contributor is sufficient.
2. **I am using data from another researcher (or institute on campus). How do I attribute this to my prospectus and dissertation?**
  - a. ANSWER: Students must provide a copyright notice in an appendix if the work or data is copyrighted. Please provide the IRB number within the Data and Methods section if the data came from a previously approved IRB. The university will [require a copy of the IRB or IACUC approval form](#) if human subjects were used for your research. If you are using readily available secondary data, your Data and Methods section should detail these sources.
3. **What is the process for the dissertation prospectus defense?**

- a. ANSWER: Once your prospectus is completed, please send the finished document to your committee and chair **two weeks** before your agreed-upon prospectus defense date. The defense meeting should last **no more than 90 minutes**. Your prospectus defense is like the final defense. It should be open to the public, and students are required to notify the UA director so that SUAPP units can be notified of the date and time. During this meeting, you should plan to present your prospectus, proposed chapter outlines, analytical approach, proposed contributions to the literature, and field questions from your committee and other attendees. Once your dissertation committee has approved your prospectus (with or without edits), please submit the [Thesis/ Dissertation Proposal Defense Form](#) (in e-Retrieve) to the Graduate School and UA Director after your committee members have electronically signed it. You should include a copy of the revised and approved prospectus with the form.