

THO 9295/9695 Doctoral Seminar

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How to develop a Project Proposal

Where to start?

Start with the end in view:

The successful defence of a completed thesis!

What does it take to complete a thesis successfully?

FACULTÉ DES ÉTUDES SUPÉRIEURES ET POSTDOCTORALES, RAPPORT D'ÉVALUATION DE THÈSE (new form)

The role of the Project Proposal?

- Helps to ensure that the completed thesis is
 - an original contribution to a field of study
 - has a clearly identified (and identifiable) method for investigation of that field
 - is of publishable quality, and
 - is do-able in the **recommended** time-period (2-3 years) and that it will take no longer than the **required** time period (maximum 4 years).

Audience for the Project Proposal?

- Two audiences:
 - specialists in your field (usually represented by faculty members in your Concentration)
 - astute readers (other scholars in Theology, represented by members of the other Concentrations of the Faculty of Theology)

The elements of the Project Proposal

Manuel / Handbook, Doctorat en théologie / Doctorate in Theology, 2009-
2010, Section 6

2. Statement of the Problem

- According to the PhD Manual
 - “Décrire brièvement, en quelques phrases, ce dont on veut traiter.”
 - “In the thesis project, candidates:
 - identify the question which initiated their research and set out the objectives of the project;
 - indicate which difficulties might occur during the course of the research as well as the specific scope of the project.”

Statement of the Problem: Another perspective

- The Statement of the Problem allows you to “introduce the reader to the recognised general subject area and how your topic is related. Briefly point out why it is a significant topic and what contribution your work will make.” [University of New South Wales Learning Centre](#)

What does that mean?

- Think of this section as
 - An opportunity to set before your reader why you personally are proposing to undertake your project, and
 - An opportunity to elicit your readers' good-will towards your project.

Statement of the problem: broadly

- Lead your reader into the area you are focusing on
 - What is the topic you wish to work on? (A brief introduction to the topic)
 - Why are you working on this? This question can be broken down into smaller questions:
 - what brought you to this topic?
 - why is there a need for study on this topic?
 - what is at stake?
 - what leads me to want to spend 4-6 years doing this?
 - what is the larger social or church-related relevance of this topic?

Statement of the problem: specific

- What is the topic?
 - This is necessary because the next section (State of the Question) will ask: what has already been done on and around this topic?
- Include a possible implication of your work, if successfully completed

3. State of the Question

- According to the PhD Manual:
 - “À partir de la littérature appropriée, décrire l'état de la question dans lequel s'inscrit le projet de thèse.”

What does that mean?

- What has already been done on and around this topic?
- Why should something else be done on it?

Significance of the State of the Question

- This is very important for the following reasons:
 - You cannot do what someone else has already done (ORIGINALITY)
 - Your work must be a contribution to the field (CONTRIBUTION)
- The job of your director, committee, and the Faculty is to ensure that your thesis is an original contribution.

State of the Question for two audiences

- The SQ shows that you have a clear grasp of the major lines of conversation in the field:
 - a specialist should be able to agree;
 - an astute reader will find your presentation compelling
- For the specialist:
 - Your methodology and hypothesis will suggest how your thesis will be an original contribution to the body of existing research and the questions that are asked in the field. The SQ shows where it will fit and the original contribution it will make.
- For the astute reader:
 - SQ should be such that a reader has a clear idea of
 - what has been done on this topic?
 - where do gaps/holes/incomplete/inadequate work exist presently?
 - why is there a need for your particular thesis on this topic?

5. Methodology

- According to the PhD Manual:
 - “Présenter la méthode qui permettront de vérifier l’hypothèse et de mener les recherches.”
 - Candidates:
 - “explain the methodology that will be used to verify their hypothesis”
 - “specify which method(s) they intend to use to attain the objectives of the research”
 - “detail which resources are at their disposal for the completion of this project”

Methodology: significance

The method is probably the most crucial but also the most difficult part of the project.

Role of the Methodology section

- In the Statement of the Problem you indicated
 - the field you wish to study and what data you think are broadly pertinent to an important question you wish to study
- In the State of the Question you indicated
 - what others have made of this data thus far
- In the Methodology, you begin to identify
 - how you will approach the data and why.

Methodology: An overview

(University of New South Wales)

- Describe your proposed method in sufficient detail so that the reader is clear about the following:
 - What kind of information will you be using?
 - From what sources will the information be obtained?
 - What resources will you require?
 - What methodology will you be using?
 - Why have you selected this approach?
 - What ethical and safety issues have you identified and how do you propose to proceed?

Method: Two different meanings

1. How will you go about doing the thesis?
2. What approach will you use to understand the data to be explored in the thesis?

Method: 1. How will you go about doing the thesis?

- What will you need to do to get at the data?
 - **Not:** How will you interpret YOUR data? (That is the next question.)
 - This question is: How will you gather the data (often the same data that others have gathered) so as later to interpret it (for which you will need the Method part 2)?

Method: Suggested ways to get at the data

(from [Brigham Young University](#))

- Library research
 - in primary documents
 - in books and periodicals
- Interview
 - Develop interview questions
 - Identify participants
 - Schedule interviews
- Research on an existing theoretical model
- Application of a particular theory to a text or situation
- Development of a theoretical model
- Observations or site visits
- Note taking
- Use of analysis software
- Textual analysis (e.g., the edition of a text)
- Prepare written report
- Establish analytical procedures
 - qualitative research
 - experiential narrative

Method: 2. Understanding the data that you have gathered

- Think of the method as the filter you will choose to look at a finite sub-set of the infinite amount of data possible in your field of interest.
 - How many ways are there to look at the data in your field?
 - What do you think is the best way to explore the data in your field for your topic?
 - Why?
- Describe the method that you propose.

4. Hypothesis

- According to the PhD Manual:
 - “Expliquer quelle hypothèse ou quelle façon nouvelle d`aborder la question permettront de poursuivre une recherche originale.”
 - This challenge is to “formulate an original hypothesis”

Significance of the Hypothesis

This is the distilled essence of your thesis.

This the axis of your project.

Everything hinges on your hypothesis.

Hypothesis: What it must be

- Clearly and easily identifiable
- Arguable

Hypothesis: Clearly and easily identifiable

- The hypothesis should clearly identifiable, probably 'in 25 words or less'. (Though it is the focal point of your project, it is probably the shortest element of the project.)
- It should consist of something that suggests:
 - I propose that.....
 - I intend to prove/establish/argue that ...

Hypothesis: Arguable

- Imagine your hypothesis rhetorically (agonistically):
 - As you attempt to formulate your hypothesis, your “opponent” is sitting across the table from you and arguing with you asserting...
 - Wouldn't it be better to propose that....?
 - How can you propose that when everyone knows that...?
 - Didn't so-and-so propose that the opposite was true?
 - What is your evidence for this?
 - Is this the best way to approach this data?

6. Table of Contents

- According to the PhD Manual:
 - “Même si un plan détaillé du projet de thèse n`est pas nécessaire à ce stade-ci du travail, une table des matières provisoire aidera à mieux cerner les orientations de la recherche.”

TOC: Provisional

- The proposed TABLE OF CONTENTS is provisional.
- Should provide guidance to the overall flow of the thesis.

TOC: Divisions

- Chapters
- Parts
 - It may be more helpful to think in terms of parts, than of chapters.
 - For example:
 - Part 1: History of interpretation
 - Part 2: Method used to study the material, and why
 - Part 3: Analysis of the text in question using the method

TOC: Annotations

- You may wish to annotate your TOC by identifying how a chapter or a part will address the elements of your thesis and why.

7. Bibliography

- According to the PhD Manual
 - “Présenter une bibliographie organisée, concise, limitée au sujet et qui démontre une bonne connaissance de la matière. On présente normalement une bibliographie de base, qui à ce stade-ci, n’a pas encore besoin d’être complète.”

Bibliography: What must it include?

- What is required is a representative, not an exhaustive, bibliography.
- It must include any works to which reference is made in the text of the Proposal.

Bibliography: What should it do?

- Should provide
 - specialists in the field with a clear indication that you know the pertinent literature
 - astute readers with a guide to the literature related to what you have said in the body of the Project Proposal

Bibliography: Suggestions

- It may be helpful to present the bibliography as a subject bibliography, rather than an alphabetical bibliography
- You should ensure that you have followed the University's accepted style manuals.
- You should make it of reasonable length.

1. Title

- According to the PhD Manual:
 - “Il est de l'intérêt de l'étudiante de choisir un titre qui illustre bien la recherche qu'elle compte entreprendre. Le titre proposé doit être concis et précis, donnant, avec un minimum de mots, une idée exacte du sujet.”

Title: My suggestions

- The title should contain ONLY the essential words that indicate what you intend to show / do.
- Think in terms of Internet / database search engines:
 - what three terms are crucial for someone to find your thesis?
 - If someone is looking for material in your area, will your thesis “come up” on *Dissertation Abstracts*?
- Avoid “marketing” phrases for the title of your thesis.
 - A catchy title is only valuable if your thesis is published, and usually your publisher will do this for you.
- Remember: your topic, not your title, is all that is registered with the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies of the University of Ottawa

Additional Comments and Conclusions

- Your topic must be focused and fairly narrow and the proposal should then be clear and compelling.
- Make sure that you have discussed with your Director and your Committee what your Project Proposal can and should look like.
- The Proposal should be error-free. (This helps reassure the Faculty that your thesis will be!)

Follow-up

- Allen, G.R. (1976) *The graduate student's guide to theses and dissertations: A practical manual for writing and research*. San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass.
- Cryer, P. (1996) *The research student's guide to success*. Buckingham, Open University Press.
- Davis, G.B. & Parker, C.A. (1979) *Writing the doctoral dissertation: A systematic approach*. Woodbury, NY, Barrons Educational Series.
- Laws, K. (1995) *Preparing a Thesis or Dissertation Proposal*. University of Sydney (Australia).
- Phillips, E.M. & Pugh D.S. (1987) *How to get a Ph. D.: A handbook for students and their supervisors*. 2nd Ed. Buckingham, Open University Press.
- Karathwohl, D.R. (1988) *How to prepare a research proposal. Guidelines for funding and dissertations in the social and behavioural sciences*. 3rd Ed. New York, Syracuse University Press.

Follow-up

- You may find valuable the discussions at
 - ThesisBlog.com
 - DissertationBlog.com
- But do not even think about buying your Project Proposal from them or from MastersThesisWriting.com

Or you will end up here.....



THE GATES OF HELL