

Applied Linguistics Dissertation Prospectus Guidelines

This document presents guidelines for what is minimally acceptable for a prospectus that is ready to defend. In consultation with your dissertation supervisor, you may choose to present a prospectus that goes beyond these guidelines. You should send your full written dissertation prospectus to your full committee at least two weeks before the defense. Before this, your chair should have had a chance to give you feedback.

Your dissertation should be based on an analysis of data you have collected yourself. You should follow social science conventions for the format, which means that your prospectus should include the following sections:

Introduction:

The introduction should include a statement of the research problem and a brief summary of your project that provides a rationale for your study and explains why your study is important. This section sets the stage for your research questions, and you should include specific research questions here as well.

The introduction may also include information on the research context.

This should be a minimum of one to two pages.

Literature Review:

The purpose of the literature review is to provide your reader with an explanation of past relevant research that shows why your study is important. It should both give your reader enough background knowledge to understand your dissertation and should explain to the reader why your research is necessary.

The literature review should be seen as an extended argument for your dissertation. The literature review should include discussion of foundational, seminal research and theory as well as the current research most similar to (and most relevant to) your research. It should not just be a summary, but should provide a synthesis and analysis of research. Your literature review should be as up to date as possible, including the most recent published research. The purpose of this chapter is to acknowledge scholarly works as a context for your research. Limited non-scholarly sources written for non-linguists (e.g. media sources, etc.) can be used as a bridge to your examination of scholarly works. Similarly, since dissertations mark the beginning stages of scholarly work, they shouldn't form a huge section of your literature review either. Peer-reviewed, published research should comprise most of your literature review.

The literature review should not be a collection of study summaries. For some studies, you will only discuss findings. For others that are more similar to your study, or studies that your work responds to, you will include more details on the methods to help the reader understand the results and your position. As you read studies and write your literature review, ask yourself why the reader needs to know the details you are including.

NOTE: you don't have to tear the previous studies apart in order to give your own work credibility. You simply need to explain what we currently know because of their work, and then explain how your work will make yet another contribution to what we know on your topic.

Something to keep in mind: While classes don't necessarily require this, in your dissertation, the lit. review will need to be comprehensive. For your prospectus, your literature review should minimally be 15-20 pages. It may be considerably longer.

Data/Methodology:

In this section, you'll talk about how you will do your study. Sub-sections in this section will vary according to the type of research and should be determined in consultation with your advisor. In general, it should include information about participants (including biodata and inclusion/exclusion criteria), research design (including any treatment groups), all data collection instruments (and the process involved in creating them), the procedures (step by step how data will be collected), and descriptions of each type of analysis you will use, your chosen texts/data and what frameworks you will use to analyze it.

Consider questions like: Why is your data adequate to answer your research question(s)? How will you collect your data and why will you collect it that way? What possible arguments against the validity of your data might someone else come up with? What are the limitations of your data? (no data set can cover everything, so don't see this as a shortcoming of your study). Do you anticipate any ethical concerns with data collection and how do you plan on dealing with these?

You also need to discuss your process for analyzing your data – how will you do it and why is that the right process for answering the research question you posed? Play Devil's Advocate with yourself – what shortcomings might someone else find and how will you acknowledge and account for them?

The point of the methods section is to give your committee a full understanding of how you will conduct the study so that they can verify that your plan is acceptable.

As you develop your methods, it is helpful to also begin to draft your IRB application. Keep in mind that the IRB will ask for information (e.g., data security) that does not need to be included in the prospectus.

The methods section should be around 10-15 pages in length. You may also need to append research materials, such as surveys or test items.

Timeline

You should include at the end of the prospectus a proposed timeline for when you will apply for IRB approval, collect data (including any pilot data), when you will transcribe, code, and analyze your data, when you will draft different chapters, and when you (generally) plan to defend your dissertation.

Reference List:

You should include a “Works Cited” section where you list any bibliographic sources that you used in your study. See the University’s format guidelines and give yourself time – this always takes longer than you think.

Other format suggestions:

The University has strict guidelines for format the dissertation, including font and spacing that you should follow when preparing your prospectus, so that what you’ve written will transfer over to your dissertation without a lot of editing. Be sure to allow ample time to go over them, adhere to them, check them, and revise what you already did when they tell you to.

Use headers & sub-headers to provide a ‘road map’ for your reader.