

## The Written Prospectus

The prospectus begins as the *blueprint* or plan for the thesis and evolves into a *contractual agreement* between the student and his or her thesis committee. Students meet with their thesis committee chair to determine a research topic and plan their prospectus and thesis, including a schedule of meeting times and a benchmarked time frame for completing the thesis. As a general guideline, the text of the full prospectus should be between 15-25 pages (excluding references, appendices). ***All members of the committee must receive the prospectus at least two weeks prior to the end of the first semester's thesis work.*** The written prospectus should adhere to either APA or MLA publication format and address the following prompts:

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**COVER PAGE:** including title, author, date, and purpose of the submission.

### ONE-PAGE ABSTRACT

#### RESEARCH PROBLEM

- What is the goal of the research project?
- What is the problem, issue, or critical focus to be investigated?
- What are the important terms to be defined?
- What is the significance of the problem?
  - Do you want to test or extend a theory?
  - Do you want to test or evaluate competing theories?
  - Do you want to analyze an overlooked, but important, message or set of messages?
  - Do you want to analyze an important or compelling message or set of messages that, as yet, has not garnered scholarly attention?
  - Do you want to correct previous research that wasn't conducted very well?
  - Do you want to resolve inconsistent results from earlier studies?
  - Do you want to solve a practical problem?
  - Do you want to test a method or methodology?

#### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE / JUSTIFICATION FOR STUDY

- What is the theoretical framework for this investigation?
- Are there complementary or competing theoretical frameworks?
- What does previous research reveal about the different aspects of the problem?
- What research questions and/or hypotheses emerge from the literature review?
  - Is your research question focused enough to yield tangible insight from analysis?

- Do you have the resources, time, skill, and energy necessary to address this question?
- Will your research help answer a question about human messages and interactions that will advance current understanding of communication processes and characteristics?

### **JUSTIFICATION FOR RHETORICAL ARTIFACT(S) (IF DOING RHETORICAL CRITICISM)**

- Are desired artifacts readily available?
- Can artifacts be analyzed in the time available given designated method or analysis approach?
- Can you provide direct evidence as to the impact or importance of your selected artifacts?

### **METHODS (SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES)**

- What will constitute the data for the research?
- What materials and information are necessary to conduct the research?
  - How will they be obtained?
  - What special problems can be anticipated in acquiring materials and info?
  - What are the limitations in availability and reporting of materials and info?
- Who or what will provide the data for the research?
  - What is the population being studied?
  - Who will be the study's participants?
  - Which sampling technique will be used?
- What instrumentation (if any) or other inquiry tools will be used?
  - Why use these instruments rather than others?
  - How reliable and valid have these instruments proven to be?
- What methods or techniques will be used to collect data?
  - What are the variables?
  - How will they be manipulated, controlled, measured, and/or observed?
- What procedures will be applied to the methods or techniques?
  - What are the limitations of this methodology?
  - What factors will affect the study's internal and external validity?
  - How will plausible rival hypotheses be minimized?
  - What sources of bias will exist and how will they be controlled?
- Will any ethical principles be jeopardized? How will participants be debriefed?

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

- How will the data be analyzed?

- What statistical procedures will be used (if any)?
- What criteria will be used to determine whether hypotheses are supported and/or conclusions are valid?

### **CONCLUDING INFORMATION**

- How will the final research report be organized (outline)?
- What sources have you examined thus far that pertain to your study (reference list)?
- What instruments, analysis tools, questions, artifacts, or other data must be made available (appendices)?
- (FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE): What is your working timeframe for obtaining human subjects clearance (if applicable), collecting and analyzing the data, and thesis writing?
- (FOR RHETORICAL CRITICISM): What is your working timeframe for artifact collection, analysis, and

Rubin, R. B., Rubin, A. M., & Piele, L. J. (1993). *Communication research: Strategies and sources* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. (pp. 238-240)

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