

THESIS PROPOSAL

Thesis proposals are typically 20-25 pages. Section order may vary, and individual students will make these decisions in consultation with their full Thesis Advisory Committee. Section headings should follow a logical, consistent format. In some cases, Sections 2 and 3 may be in the reverse order, or Sections 4 and 5 may be in the reverse order if that makes the proposal flow better. The following is a brief synopsis of what is typically expected in each section of the thesis proposal:

SECTION 1: Introduction/Proposal Abstract

The proposal introduction consists of:

- One or two sentences summarizing Section 2 (Context)
- One or two sentences summarizing Section 3 (Theoretical Background)
- One or two sentences summarizing Section 4 (Methods)
- One or two sentences summarizing Section 5 (Purpose/Research Questions)
- One or two sentences summarizing Section 6 (Significance)

The writing is clear and concise and effectively orients the reader to the more detailed narrative that follows.

SECTION 2: Context

The context section begins with an introductory paragraph that orients the reader to what will be covered in this section.

This section describes the context or site or topic area where the study occurs. For example, in a study of women peacemakers in Northern Ireland, the context section would cover the Northern Ireland conflict. Another example would be in a study about introducing a new school curriculum in Little Haiti, this section would discuss the school

studied (the issues there, etc.) and Little Haiti (the geography, demography, etc.).

Or the context section may focus on a particular issue. Yet another example would be in a study on interventions in the child soldier issue, the context section might focus on describing the child soldier issue while the theory section would focus on theories of (a) ethnic conflict, (b) child development and violence, and (c) international organizations.

The concluding paragraph of the section emphasizes the significance of the research context and site and transitions logically into the next section.

SECTION 3: Theoretical Background

This section reviews the theoretical literature that underlies the study.

Usually two to four theoretical topics inform a thesis project, and each of these bodies of theory should be presented in different sections. For example, for a study on women peacemakers in Northern Ireland, the theoretical literature might cover (a) causes of ethnic conflict, (b) definitions of peace, and (c) gender theory. Another example would be for a study on school curriculum in Little Haiti, the theoretical literature might cover (a) knowledge and power, (b) culturally appropriate curriculum, (c) empowerment and Conflict Resolution skills training, and (d) peace education.

It may also be possible to organize the theoretical background around other kinds of themes, but this section should have a coherent, logical organization that in itself reflects an interpretation of the theoretical literature.

This section has one or two introductory paragraphs that orient the reader to what will be covered in this section. For example, the introduction (or one paragraph of a two-paragraph introduction) could be structured in such a way that there is one sentence for each of the following sub-sections within the section. For example, “Four theoretical considerations inform this study. First, [...]. Second, [...]. Finally, [...].”

The theoretical background must review the major relevant works and display a thorough understanding of the relevant theory. The number of references listed can vary, but a good rule of thumb is that references should number 60 to 200. Importantly, references should be up-to-date, with the majority of references within the past ten years. The concluding paragraph(s) of the section should integrate the previous sections and indicate how this study will address unanswered theoretical concerns, and/or indicate the significance of the theory to the thesis project.

SECTION 4: Methodology

Provide an introduction to the section that orients the reader to what will be discussed in this section.

Describe in detail the procedure used:

- Participants (who they are and where they are located; why this group of participants is selected for the study; how participants will be selected; how access will be obtained; ethical concerns such as confidentiality; when and how often participants will be met with). Note: Potential risks and benefits to participants should be discussed (even if the risks are minimal).

- Role of the researcher (what posture you will take as researcher, e.g., participant-observer or independent interviewer; how these roles fit with the research questions and theoretical framework; your prior experience that may be relevant and the significance of that to the study, e.g., in terms of researcher bias)

- Data gathering or data generation techniques (detailed rationale and description of how data will be gathered)

- Data analysis (description of and rationale for the data analysis process)

- Time-line for study

- Rationale for methodology

Sometimes, there is an additional body of theory that is relevant to the methodology. For example, a particular type of methodology (e.g., semi-

projective tests, narrative methods, autoethnography, etc.) may require some description and theoretical support. A concluding paragraph summarizes the section and transitions to the next section.

SECTION 5: Research Questions

The section has an introductory paragraph. This paragraph may restate the purpose of the study by way of introduction to the research questions that follow.

Outline the major research question(s). Importantly, detail any sub-questions. For example, if you are studying forgiveness among Manitoba mediators, raise sub-questions relating to gender, ethnicity, type of practice, professional background, etc.

The section has a concluding paragraph.

SECTION 6: Significance of the Study

In this concluding section, the significance of the study is emphasized. For example:

- How and/or why the study will advance knowledge within the Peace and Conflict Studies field;
- How the study will contribute to the development of theoretical knowledge more generally;
- What practice-related contributions the study will make;
- What policy implications the study will have; and/or
- Why this matters in the world.