

Required Elements of the Research-based Thesis Proposal *(supplement to the Honors College Thesis Guide)*

Formatting

Proposals should be typed, double-spaced, using 12-point font, and paginated with one-inch margins. Format style is based on your discipline. Discuss with your thesis advisor if you should use MLA, APA, Chicago, etc. The Proposal should be 8-10 pages total (suggestions for length of each section are listed below). Pages must be numbered.

Title page - 1 page

- contains short, descriptive title of the proposed thesis
- author, institution, and thesis advisor
- date of delivery

Introduction - 2-3 pages

This section sets the context for your proposed project and must capture the reader's interest.

- Explain the background of your study, starting from a broad picture narrowing in on your research question.
- Review what is known about your research topic as far as it is relevant to your thesis
- Cite relevant references; use primary and secondary sources.
- The introduction should be at a level that makes it easy to understand for readers with a general background in your discipline.
- Define any terms that may be unfamiliar to those outside of your discipline.
- If you are stuck on this section, try writing it last. Your best overview of the project will most likely come after you have written the other sections of your proposal.

Thesis statement - up to a ½ page

In a couple of sentences, state the purpose of your thesis.

- This statement can take the form of a hypothesis, research question, project statement, or goal statement.
- The thesis statement should capture the essence of your intended project and also help to put boundaries around it.
- Provide a persuasive rationale for your argument by answering the following questions: Why is your study important? To whom is it important?

Approach/methods - 2-3 pages

This section contains an overall description of your approach, materials, and procedures.

- What methods will be used?
- How will data be collected and analyzed?
- What materials will be used?
- Include calculations, technique, procedure, and equipment as applicable.
- Describe untested and untestable positions, basic values, world views, or beliefs that are assumed in your study.
- Disclose any conceptual and methodological limitations.

Work plan, including timeline - 2-3 pages

Describe in detail what you plan to do from the date you turn in your proposal until the completion of your thesis project.

- List the stages of your project.
- Indicate deadlines you have set for completing each stage of the project, including any work you have completed already.
- Think about any particular challenges that need to be overcome and allow for extra time to complete each stage.

List of references - 1-2 pages

- Cite all ideas, concepts, text, data that are not your own.
- If you make a statement, back it up with your own data or a reference.
- All references cited in the text must be listed.
- Do not use footnotes or endnotes in the proposal.

Appendices – *if needed*

- Include photos, survey instruments, IRB/IACUC approval letter, etc.

Tips

Figures

- Figures serve to illustrate important aspects of the background material, sample data, and analysis techniques.
- A well-chosen and well-labeled figure can reduce text length and improve proposal clarity.

Grammar/spelling

- Poor grammar and spelling distract from the content of the proposal. The reader focuses on the grammar and spelling problems and misses key points made in the text. Modern word processing programs have grammar and spell checkers. Use them, and then proof read the document again yourself to catch what the word processor may have missed.
- Read your proposal aloud - then have a friend read it aloud. If your sentences seem too long, make two or three sentences instead of one.
- Simple wording is generally better.

Revisions

- You have been given a due date for your proposal to be turned into the Honors College (generally mid-February for Spring term and mid/late September for Fall term). Please note that this draft should be, to your eyes, in a finished state.
- Your advisor needs time to review your proposal **BEFORE** it is submitted to the Honors College. Ideally, he or she should have 2-3 chances to review your proposal before you submit it. This will give you and your advisor a chance to work out any major issues with your proposal before it is reviewed by the Thesis committee.
- You will continue to revise your proposal based on your research, conversations with your advisor, and feedback from your committee, but strive to submit the best possible proposal early in the semester.
- It is crucial that you regularly meet with your faculty mentor throughout the semester, even after the final proposal has been submitted.