



Universität Hamburg

DER FORSCHUNG | DER LEHRE | DER BILDUNG

## Information on preparing a doctoral dissertation proposal in educational science at Universität Hamburg

In addition to information on the general admission procedure for doctoral studies in educational science at Universität Hamburg (please refer to the doctoral degree regulations), the following recommendations will be helpful for you in preparing a proposal. They should be regarded as a tool, not rules that must be followed. Other forms of proposals are also conceivable if they fulfill the goals listed below.

**Please note:** When preparing the electronic transmission of your application for admission to doctoral studies at Universität Hamburg, please remember the doctoral committee has decided that all files must be condensed into a single PDF file (folder) in the future. Individual files will no longer be accepted. When submitting original documents, please also make sure that all letters (expert reviews, etc.) have the original signature on them.

### Contents:

1. The proposal
2. How to prepare your proposal—a few tips
3. Contents of proposal
4. Formalities
5. Additional information

### 1. The proposal

In order to earn an academic qualification, candidates for degrees must prepare appropriate papers (bachelor's and master's theses or a doctoral dissertation). A proposal functions as an **outline** of the paper, presenting the planned **development** and **examination** of the candidate's topic in order to provide an initial impression of the subject and the aim of research. This gives both supervisors as well as the doctoral committee the opportunity to form an opinion on the relevance of the topic and, in particular, the feasibility of the paper. The author in turn acquires an **overview** of his or her chosen subject area, frames his or her paper, thereby setting the direction for the proposed research. Presentation of the research question(s) that the paper will examine and answer is therefore relevant.

The doctoral project and the proposal should be coordinated in detail with the supervisor. Compliance with the doctoral degree regulations from the Department of Education, in their currently valid version, is also required. A proposal must also be prepared for **cumulative and publication-based doctoral dissertations** and is helpful in structuring the planned research work.

## **2. How to prepare your proposal—a few tips**

We recommend first acquiring an overview of the relevant research in the subject area. This approach will bring you up to date on the **current state of research** in order to then derive research questions for your own work. These questions should be well defined, clear and precisely formulated, and examined critically from all angles.

Key questions to help you plan your project may include:

- What research topic do I want to investigate?
- What methods can I use to answer the questions?
- Which gap in research will my dissertation close?

Once you have found the answers to these questions, you can begin designing your research project to align it with your respective field and theoretical framework.

## **3. Contents of proposal**

The proposal should include the following main points:

### *Object of your research*

- *Outline of the research issue and objectives of project*
- *Definition of terms*
- *Planned methodological approach*

In a clear, precise, and problem-focused manner, you should first outline what issue or subject your paper will address and what questions you will attempt to answer. This should clarify why you are researching this subject and for whom your research will be relevant. Real-life observations, newspaper articles, topics currently under discussion, academic research, etc. can be used as an outline, informational statement, or starting point. This will provide an initial indication of your underlying theoretical assumptions as you investigate the research question.

### *State of research (literature review)*

You should then present the current state of research on the topic, along with your own critical reflections, in order to provide a brief overview of the status of the relevant academic discussion. Presenting the current status of research and academic debate on your chosen topic will demonstrate your familiarity with the research context. In addition, your depiction of the current state of research can be used as the basis for deriving your line of questioning and explaining the benefits of your research. The following questions can help you decide how to present this material: What existing publications and research are there on this topic? What are the key findings? You should define the initial key terms to be used in your paper here as well.

### *Proposed research project*

- *Research interests*
- *Research question*

After presenting the object of your research, you should introduce your research question as precisely and concretely as possible. It can be broken down into further sub-questions as a means of providing a broad initial structure of the dissertation.

### *Theoretical framework*

In the next step, outline the theoretical framework of your paper in which your research will be embedded. You should establish this framework for your paper immediately after presenting your research question. The framework will indicate your intended focus while collecting,

evaluating, examining, and presenting data. Different theories from different disciplines may exist in your chosen subject area. Which ones you choose to work with should depend on your object of research and your research question. As soon as you have established the theoretical framework for your project, you can begin developing the research design.

#### *Research design*

- Research approach
- Preliminary work
- Access to the field
- Data collection methods
- Data evaluation strategy
- Relevance of research

Selecting the right methods is crucial to successful data collection. You should therefore first acquire an overview of the available data collection and evaluation methods. The humanities and social sciences offer a wide range of qualitative and quantitative procedures. You can access data by means of different types of interviews (individual, group, or expert interviews), analysis of documents, systematic observations, and laboratory experiments, etc. What method you select naturally depends on your respective object of research. This is where you must decide if you are going to conduct a longitudinal or cross-sectional study, if it will be a case study, a historiographical or comparative analysis, whether or not method triangulation is required, etc. Once you have made these decisions, you must explain why you chose the respective method(s) as well as elaborating on the strengths and weaknesses of your chosen method(s) in comparison to others. This is the ideal opportunity for underscoring once again the relevance of your research, for example because you chose different research methods than those previously used to examine this subject.

#### *Project plan and schedule*

The project plan and schedule will provide guideposts for when, how, and why certain goals need to be reached. This will help you assess how much time you need and allocate it in greater detail. Ideally, doctoral studies take three years if you are able to focus fully on your doctoral dissertation and one additional activity preparing you for the doctorate. On average, however, doctoral studies take significantly longer. According to the *Bundesbericht Wissenschaftlicher Nachwuchs 2013* (Federal Report on Young Researchers 2013, in German only), the average time required to earn a doctorate in the humanities and social sciences is currently between four and six years. Students' personal background situation (such as holding a position as a research associate for teaching or doctoral studies, research funding, seed financing, etc.) play a role here.

However, according to the doctoral degree regulations for the Faculty of Education, for the subjects educational science and human movement science at Universität Hamburg: "As a rule, the doctoral dissertation should be submitted after three years in agreement with the supervisor."

#### *Literature used (excerpt)*

At the end of the proposal, you should list a selection of the most important literature to be used. This makes it clear that the chosen object of research is within the scope of the current discussion. The bibliography should be well structured and oriented to the criteria of the respective subject area.

#### 4. Formalities

A proposal functions as an initial roadmap for further work on the project. It should therefore be no more than eight to ten pages, including bibliography. You may print on both the front and back of the paper. Typical fonts used include Calibri, Arial, and Times New Roman (font size 11 or 12), line spacing 1.5.

#### 5. Additional information

**King, Gary 2005:** Publication, Publication, unpublished manuscript,  
<http://gking.harvard.edu/files/paperspub.pdf>

**Schwarzer, Gudrun 2001:** "Forschungsanträge verfassen. Ein praktischer Ratgeber für Sozialwissenschaftler/-innen" (Writing Research Applications. A Practical Guide for Social Scientists, in German only), in: *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen*, 8:1, 141-156,  
[http://www.nomos.de/pin\\_rl/include\\_zeitschrift/zib/zib0101\\_schwarzer.pdf](http://www.nomos.de/pin_rl/include_zeitschrift/zib/zib0101_schwarzer.pdf)