

Guidelines for the dissertation prospectus for French

The prospectus describes and sketches a provisional outline for the dissertation before it has actually been written. Thus it represents a malleable blueprint for the problems your dissertation will address and you will more than likely revise it along the way, expanding or narrowing as your focus sharpens and your research progresses. It goes without saying that you should begin by discussing your topic with your doctoral advisor or committee, but once you know the general direction you plan to pursue, your prospectus will be organized as follows.

A prospectus is generally short, containing no more than 10 double-spaced, typescript pages, followed by another 10 pages of bibliography. Follow MLA guidelines (6th edition or more recent) for your bibliographical entries and if your prospectus contains quotations (keep in mind these should be kept to a minimum), use parenthetical citation. (Special instructions for a prospectus on a French linguistics topic follow below).

Working Title

The dissertation should have a provisional title that describes the project in a concise and interesting way.

Description and Significance of the Project

This is generally the longest section of the prospectus and can be divided into two separate sections (Description of the Project / Significance of the Project). It states the problem or set of problems and related questions that will be your central focus (what is it about?). These questions can be theoretical, historical, critical, etc. It situates these questions within the broader framework of an extant scholarly dialogue on the topic (what is the spectrum and where do you stand on it?). It spells out what has already been discovered on the topic, what remains to be explored, and why such exploration will prove important and lead to further enquiry in your field. It generally indicates the expected readership (who will be interested?). It specifically names the works, authors, and time frame you will explore. It anticipates the results of the inquiry and states them in the form of a thesis (what will you prove?).

Methodology

Generally the hardest part of the prospectus, your statement on methodology reveals the processes you will go through to develop your study. It states *how* you will approach the topic. Although it is not essential to state allegiance to any particular school or schools of enquiry, it is a good idea to describe the ideas and approaches that have helped you to define your topic so far.

Chapter-by-Chapter Description

Include provisional titles and a descriptive paragraph for each chapter, showing how the chapters weave together to form a whole. Remember that the dissertation should be about 200 pages long, with chapters of about 40-50 pages each. This section should demonstrate a balance of the parts.

Plan of Work

This is, simply stated, a calendar. By what date will Chapter 1 be completed? Chapter 2? The Conclusion? How much time will you leave at the end for revisions?

Special instructions for a prospectus on a French linguistics topic

For a prospectus on a French linguistics topic in which cited forms, numbered examples, glosses, translations, etc. will appear, consult sections 4-6 of the Language stylesheet for guidelines <<http://www.lsadc.org/info/pubs-lang-style.cfm>>. If diagrams, tables or data examples make up a significant portion of a prospectus, it may well exceed 10 pages (plus bibliography). Depending upon the availability of prior published research, a linguistics bibliography may be substantially shorter than 10 pages. If your topic involves linguistic field work or collection of student data among human subjects, be mindful of the possible need to seek IRB approval before undertaking any actual field interviews or data collection.