

Information Sheet Research Proposal

What is a Research Proposal?



The Research Proposal is an important milestone at the beginning of the dissertation project. The students and their Supervision Teams condense their ideas into a paper that answers the following questions:

- What is the value of the dissertation for academic discourse? This entails a discussion of the state of the field, of the research hypothesis and an assessment of the dissertation's contribution to academic discourse.
- How does the dissertation answer the research hypothesis? This entails a discussion of the methodological positioning of the dissertation, the theoretical/conceptual framework and the methodic approach.

What is the purpose of the Research Proposal?

A successfully published Research Proposal fulfills three main objectives:

- Firstly, the Research Proposal concludes the orientation phase for the dissertation as it narrows down ideas and will thus provide a guideline for continuing the dissertation project.
- Secondly, the Research Proposal documents a shared understanding about the content, the proceeding and the intended results of the dissertation between students and the members of the Supervision Team. Thus, the Research Proposal ultimately consolidates reciprocal commitment.
- Thirdly, the Research Proposal also functions as an initiation to academic discourse because all full/associate professors of WU can read and comment on the proposals, and students are expected to reply to these comments.

Are there any special requirements for multiple-paper dissertations?

No; instead of giving a summary of all papers, the Research Proposal should address the overall research design and give an outlook towards the expected results.

When should the Research Proposal be submitted?

The Proposal has to be submitted in the first year of studies.

What should be the extent of the Research Proposal?

The length of the Research Proposal should be about 7.500-8.000 words including the bibliography. Proposals much exceeding this length will not be accepted and must be abridged.

How should the Research Proposal be structured?

Despite the differences between the various disciplines at WU, the Research Proposal should address the following seven aspects. These aspects are not to be understood as a fixed regulative structure, but should rather be seen as a guideline that makes it easier to answer the questions about the expected results of the dissertation, its presuppositions and the benefits it brings to its target audience.

1. *Abstract*
2. *Introduction:*
What is the topic of your dissertation? What were the reasons for choosing this topic? What is your research hypothesis? How do you define the central terms of your hypothesis? Why and for whom is it important to answer these questions?
3. *State of the field:*
What is the relevant literature for this topic? What are the open research questions? How does the research hypothesis relate to the existing literature on the topic? Are there other dissertations that cover the same topic?
4. *Theoretical-conceptual framework:*
What is the theoretical concept underlying the dissertation and in which aspect does it differ from other concepts? For all empirical studies it should be made clear what the working hypotheses are and how they differ from existing ones.

5. *Methods:*

What is the epistemological framework of the dissertation? For empirical studies it should be made clear why the specific methods of data analysis were chosen. How was the data acquired?

6. *Expected results/importance of the dissertation:*

Which results can be expected? What is new? Where does the progress for science lie? In what way can scientific discussion proceed / be stimulated by the thesis?

7. *Bibliography*

What are the steps to be taken towards a successful Research Proposal?

- Attendance of the course "*Academic Writing/Research Proposal*" is highly recommended as it provides valuable support in preparing the Research Proposal.
- *Approval of the supervisor:* The Main Supervisor has to confirm his/her approval of the Research Proposal on the form "Approval of the Research Proposal by the Main Supervisor" before it can be published on the intranet.
- *Submission to the Doctoral Office:* The following documents have to be submitted to the Doctoral Office:
 - Form „Approval of the Research Proposal by the Main Supervisor“
 - Dissertation agreement signed by main supervisor and doctoral student
 - An additional form for external lecturers is needed in case you request the appointment of an external examiner (this form is available in the download section of the homepage).
 - Research Proposal in electronic form (as pdf-document)
- *Appointment of the Supervision Team¹ and WU-internal publication:* Within 4 weeks from the day of submission, the Supervision Team will be confirmed. Subsequently the Research Proposal will be published in the WU intranet on the first day of the next month for the duration of one month. All full/associate professors can read the proposals. The titles of the currently published proposals are available at: <https://www.wu.ac.at/en/students/my-program/doctoral-phd-programs/research-proposals>
- *Comments by WU faculty:* While the Research Proposal is published online, all full/associate professors at WU can submit remarks on the Proposal to the Doctoral Office, which will then be forwarded to the doctoral students and their Supervision Team.
- *Grading of the Research Proposal by the Supervision Team:* The research proposal is given a positive or negative grade by the members of the Supervision Team, who also provide feedback reports.
- *Student's reply to the reports:* After receiving copies of the reports, the doctoral students have to address the issues raised by the feedback reports in written form. These replies are uploaded to the intranet and can be viewed by all members of the Supervision Team.

What are the formal requirements?

The first page of the Research Proposal should contain the following information:

1. Name and student ID no., the author's contact address and e-mail
2. Working title
3. Names and e-mail addresses of the members of the Supervision Team

Apart from the first page, the structure, form and design of the Research Proposal is up to the doctoral student, unless the Supervision Team deem otherwise. Generally, it should follow the rules of the specific scientific community.

¹ The Supervision Team consists of 3 or more professors (with habilitation or equivalent qualification) who support and accompany the dissertation project. The Supervision Team is announced on submission of the Research Proposal on the form „Approval of the Research Proposal by the Main Supervisor“ and is appointed by the academic director before the Proposal goes online.