

Information Sheet Research Proposal



What is a Research Proposal?

The Research Proposal is an important milestone at the beginning of the dissertation writing. Here, the students and their supervisors 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 sets an end to the orientation phase for the dissertation as it narrows down ideas and will thus provide a guideline for the continuing work on the dissertation.
- 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 doctoral committee. Thus, the Research Proposal ultimately consolidates reciprocal commitment.
- Thirdly, the Research Proposal also functions as an initiation to academic discourse because all full professors of WU can read and comment on the proposals and students are expected to engage with these comments.

Are there any special requirements for multiple-paper dissertations?

No. Even if not all papers are finished at the time, the Research Proposal should be submitted early, because 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?

We recommend submitting the Research Proposal within the third semester. Please be aware that the *defensio dissertationis* can only be held one year after the proposal has received a positive grade.

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 exceeding this length will not be accepted and must be abridged.

How should the Research Proposal be structured?

Despite all 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 crucial literature about the 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 basic concept of the dissertation and in how far does it differ from other concepts? For all empirical studies it should be made clear: what are the working hypotheses and how do they differ from existing ones?
5. *Methods:*
What is the epistemological framework of the dissertation? For empirical studies it should be made clear: Why were the specific methods of data analysis chosen? How was the data acquired?
6. *Expected results/importance of the dissertation:*
Which results can be expected? What is new? Where lies the progress for science? 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?

- Courses in the subject "*Academic Writing*" provide valuable support in preparing the Research Proposal.
- *Approval of the supervisor:* The supervisor has to confirm his/her approval of the Research Proposal on the form "Approval of the Research Proposal by the supervisor" before it can be published in 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 supervisor“
 - Form „Notification of topic and supervisor of the thesis, Request for allocation of examiners and subjects“
 - In case you request the appointment of an external examiner: Additional form for external lecturers (this form is available from the doctoral office)
 - Research Proposal in electronic form (as Word- or pdf-document)
 - a hard copy of the Research Proposal
- *Appointment of the Doctoral Committee and WU-internal publication:* Within 4 weeks from the day of submission the doctoral committee will be appointed. Subsequently the research proposal will be published at the next 1st of the month in the WU intranet for the duration of one month. All faculty with a habilitation can read the proposals. The titles of the currently published proposals can be viewed here: <https://www.wu.ac.at/en/students/my-degree-program/doctoral-phd-programs/research-proposals/>
- *Comments by WU faculty:* While the research proposal is published online, all full professors at WU can submit remarks on the proposal to the Doctoral Office, which will then be forwarded to the doctoral students and their supervisors.
- *Grading of the Research Proposal by the Doctoral Committee:* The research proposal is given a positive or negative grade by the four members of the Doctoral Committee (supervisor, second examiner and two further members), who also write feedback reports.
- *Student's reply to the reports:* After receiving copies of the gradings and reports, the doctoral students have to write a reply to the reports which will be uploaded in the intranet and can be viewed by all members of the committee.

After the Research Proposal is offline and has been graded by the Doctoral Committee, the Academic Director appoints the examiners and allocates the subjects.

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. the name and e-mail address of the supervisor

Apart from the first page, the structure, form and design of the Research Proposal is up to the doctoral student, unless the supervisor has special wishes. Generally, it should follow the rules of the specific scientific community.