



Guidelines for writing an exposé for a dissertation at the Faculty of Education, University of Hamburg

In addition to the information on the general application procedure for a doctorate in Social Work at the University of Hamburg (see **Guidelines for Admission**), the following recommendations may be useful for preparing an exposé.¹ They are intended as guidance and are not rules. Other forms of exposés are also possible if they achieve the objectives listed below.

1. The Exposé

In order to obtain a qualification in a scientific context, corresponding theses (bachelor's or master's thesis as well as dissertations) are written. The exposé serves as an outline of a thesis to present the planned development of one's own research question, thus providing a first impression of the subject and objective of the study. This gives both the supervisors and the doctoral committee the opportunity to form an opinion on the relevance of the research question and, in particular, the feasibility of the work.

The author of the work, in turn, gains an overview of the chosen topic, defines the scope, and thus establishes the guidelines for his or her own work. It is therefore important to outline the questions that will be explored and answered in the work.

The doctoral project and the exposé should be discussed in detail with the supervisor. The regulations of the current doctoral regulations of the Faculty of Education should be observed. Even for cumulative publication-based dissertations, an exposé should be prepared, as it is helpful in structuring the planned research.

2. How to make it – a few tips

It is advisable to first obtain an overview of the research relevant to the topic. This approach helps you to familiarize yourself with the current state of research so that you can derive research questions for your own work. These should be narrowly defined, clearly and precisely formulated, and critically examined.

Key questions to help you visualize your own project could be:

- What question do I want to explore?
- What methods do I want to use to answer the questions?

¹ <https://www.ew.uni-hamburg.de/studium/files/expose-prom.pdf>

- What research gap should my dissertation fill?

Once you have a clear idea of this, you can begin to develop your research design, which should be based on your chosen field and theoretical framework.

3. Content of an exposé

The exposé should contain the following key points:

Research topic

- Problem outline and content objectives
- Clarification of terms
- Planned methodological approach

First, it should be clearly, precisely, and in a problem-oriented manner explained which problem or topic the work will address, or which question will be investigated. It should be made clear why this subject is being investigated and for whom the investigation is relevant.

Observations from practice, newspaper articles, a currently discussed topic, or scientific research, etc., can serve as an outline, statement, or starting point. This already indicates which theoretical assumptions will accompany the answer to the research question.

State of research

The current state of research on the topic is then critically reflected upon in order to provide a concise overview of the relevant scientific debate.

The presentation of the state of research and debate conveys how well the author is already familiar with the chosen topic. The explanations on the state of research also serve as a basis for justifying the author's own research and research question. This can be derived from this. The question that guides the presentation can be: What has already been published and researched on this topic? What are the most important findings? The first central concepts of the work are also outlined here.

Research project

- Research interest
- Research question

Following the presentation of the state of research, the research question is formulated as precisely and concretely as possible. It can be subdivided into further sub-questions, allowing a rough outline of the work to be derived.

Theoretical framework

The next step is to outline the theoretical framework of the work in which the study will be embedded. This framing of the work takes place once the research question has been defined. This clarifies the focus with which the collected data will be collected, evaluated, examined, and presented. Different theories from various disciplines may be available here. Their selection depends on the research topic and the research question. Once the theoretical framework of the work is in place, the research design can be developed.

Research design

- Research approach
- Preliminary work

- Field access
- Data collection methods
- Data analysis strategy
- Research relevance

The choice of methods is crucial to achieve a successful research study. Therefore, it is important to first gain an overview of the available research and evaluation methods. The humanities and social sciences offer a wide range of qualitative and quantitative methods. Data can be accessed, for example, through various types of interviews (individual, group, or expert interviews), document analysis, systematic observations, laboratory experiments, etc. Of course, the selection depends on the respective research topic. Here, for example, a decision is made as to whether a longitudinal or cross-sectional study should be conducted, whether it is a case study, a historiographical or comparative analysis, whether a triangulation of methods is necessary, etc. Once the decision has been made, it is necessary to explain why the corresponding method(s) were chosen and what their strengths and weaknesses are in comparison to other methods. It is advisable to conclude by reemphasizing the relevance of the research, for example because different research methods were chosen than those commonly used for the selected research topic.

Time and work schedule

The time and work schedule serve as a means of confirming what is to be achieved, when, how, and for what purpose, in order to estimate and narrow down the time required. Ideally, the duration of the doctoral program can be three years if the time is devoted entirely to the dissertation and other activities in preparation for the doctoral program.

Literature used (extract)

A selection of the most important literature used should be listed at the end of the exposé.

This makes it clear that the chosen research topic is part of the current discussion. The bibliography should be clearly structured and follow the criteria of the respective subject.

The bibliography should be arranged alphabetically by author's last name.

4. Formal Requirements

An exposé is an initial roadmap for further work. It should not exceed 20,000 characters, including spaces and bibliography (8-10 pages). Both the front and back can be printed. Common fonts are Calibri, Arial, or Times New Roman, font size 12, and line spacing 1.15.

The exposé is an important part of the application for admission to doctoral studies. See document **Guidelines for Admission** for more information.