

Writing a Prospectus: The Checklist

by Jennifer Strtak

The requirements of the prospectus vary from department to department at Yale University. The general checklist here below is intended to provide junior graduate students with a basic framework for executing a prospectus, irrespective of their field. The checklist is structured according to six organizational units. In the initial stages of prospectus research and writing, students should think through these units as they compile their research materials/information. They can jot down point-form responses to the different question prompts listed in each of the units. As they progress in their work, students can transform their responses into formal paragraphs, thereby developing a coherent and thorough research proposal. However, students should verify with their individual departments whether or not there are additional requirements that must be included in their prospectus.

By the end of this checklist, the student (author) should be able to gauge/answer:

- if this is a feasible project
- why anyone might care about it

Unit One: The Introduction

Answer:

- what is the topic of your dissertation (what are the questions that your intervention will seek to address)?
- why is this topic important?
- what in general might we learn from the dissertation that is not known or understood?
- what are the fields that you are going to bridge together in your study?
- are you going to apply a new perspective or technique to an old field; is this possible in your study?
- what is the period of time that you are studying?
- why are you studying this period of time?
- what is the country/region you are studying?
- why are you studying this country/region?
- is there any transnational element to your project?

By the end of this section, the author should be able to:

- explain the problem they are trying to solve
- highlight the significance of the problem

Unit Two: The Literature Review

Answer:

- what has been done on the topic in the past?
- how will the proposed dissertation differ from or expand on previous work?

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By the end of this literature review, the author should be able to:

- demonstrate how they are participating in existing scholarly debates
- show how their work will contribute something new and advance the field

Unit Three: The Methodology

Answer:

- how will you conduct and structure your project?
- what type of sources will you be working with?
- what archival collections are relevant to your dissertation?
- what type of institutions will you be working from?
- where is your field work to take place?
- what type of data—qualitative, quantitative, or both—are you going to collect?
- does the information you propose to collect really measure your theoretical concepts?
- are the sources you propose to use reliable?
- are there any sources of bias in your study?
- what are the potential challenges you might encounter via your methodology?
- if you do face challenges, what is your plan to overcome them?

By the end of the methodology section, the author should be able to:

- provide adequate responses that indicate that this project has the potential to be executed with minimal hiccups

Unit Four: The Chapter Outline

Answer:

- what is the tentative outline for the internal organization of the dissertation?
- what will each chapter cover and convey (be specific)?
- how will each chapter fit into the larger project (be specific)?
- why are the chapters ordered the way they are?
- are they more or less discrete?
- are they tracing an overarching narrative trajectory?

By the end of the chapter outline section, the author should be able to:

- offer a clear idea of the themes her dissertation will address
- offer a relatively logical and straightforward path

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Unit Five: The Timeline

Answer:

- when do you plan to visit archives and do fieldwork?
- for how long do you plan to visit archives and do fieldwork?
- what are your research goals for the year (specify by term)?
- what are your chapter writing goals for each term (specify by term)?
- what grants and fellowships are you applying for?

By the end of the timeline section, the author should be able to:

- provide adequate responses that indicate that this project has the potential to be executed with minimal hiccups

Unit Six: The Bibliography

Answer:

- what are the printed sources being used in the study?
- are there any biases in these texts?

By the end of this literature review, the author should be able to:

- show that they know the relevant literature to their chosen topic