

What is a proposal meeting?

A proposal meeting is one in which you present your proposed research to your committee. This is a semi-formal requirement appropriate for projects (i.e., posters and manuscripts) and theses, but less necessary for the case-study option. It is very helpful for honing your ideas and getting input from your committee to confirm that you are headed in the right direction. The point of this is for you and your committee to carefully think through your research plan, discuss the details critically, and improve the project.

To fulfill this task, first meet with your committee chair and discuss the project you intend to pursue. Next, schedule a meeting with all members of your research committee. This should be completed before you start your second year of graduate school.

At the meeting, you will present the background and justification for your specific research questions, your specific, detailed research questions, outline your methodology, and demonstrate that you have a plan to deal with data and interpretation. You can think of this as a draft of the Introduction to your project, along with a description of your (anticipated) Method, Results, and Discussion sections. The Introduction should be fairly well-formed, the Method can be somewhat skeletal, and the Results and Discussion must necessarily be prospective (so very short).

The proposal does not have a fixed length requirement, but fewer than 5 pages would be challenging to get your point across, and more than 10 pages might be overkill. Drafts of academic manuscripts are most commonly in double-spaced format (published manuscripts are almost universally in single-spaced format). Many proposals are presented in oral format with visual support (e.g., PowerPoint). The key to the proposal is that you demonstrate (1) sufficient background justifying appropriate research questions and (2) that a feasible research plan is proposed. It is recommended that you have 2-4 very explicit research questions or hypotheses.

Logical flow often looks like this: “[this] is known in the literature. [This] is also known, which suggest [this extension] which has not been reported in the literature. We need to know about [the extension] because it is important in [these ways] or it is similar to [this problem/issue]. I will do [this specific task] to bear on the general problem. Here are my specific research questions: (1) What is the effect of X on Y? (2) What is the effect of X on Z? (3) Is there a relationship between Y and Z? Think in organized, systematic ways, populating a structure as above: (1) what is known, (2) what is not known, (3) how I can bear on what is not known, (4) precisely what will be done (the research Qs), (5) very brief sketch of methods/plans/materials/etc.