

**Dissertation Proposal Guidelines**  
**Approved by Faculty: February 8, 2017; Revised March 9, 2018**

**Preamble:** The purpose of a dissertation is the opportunity for a graduate student to demonstrate her/his ability to independently conceptualize, design, and analyze a meaningful piece of research. A knowledge of the relevant literature and theory, the ability to integrate the proposed study into the existing literature and theory, the ability to develop research hypotheses, and an ability to recognize the limitations, strengths, and implications of the study also are critical parts of the dissertation proposal.

1. A dissertation proposal should be the work of a graduate student with the guidance of a faculty mentor. It should include a *comprehensive* literature review leading to specific research hypotheses and a detailed method section. Because the length of the literature review can vary by topic, the scope of the literature review, including its length, should be determined through consultation with the student's advisor and dissertation committee as early in the process as possible. The Department of Psychological Science does not accept dissertation proposals (or dissertations) in manuscript/journal article format, even if appended with a full literature review.
2. The proposal should be in the best shape possible prior to submission to the committee. The role of committee members is to evaluate the proposal and the candidate, not to design the study, help write the proposal, or help design data analytic approaches.
3. The candidate should know her/his data analytic plan and be able to justify it.
4. The oral defense of the dissertation proposal is the task of the candidate, not the primary faculty mentor.
5. The dissertation proposal should be submitted to the committee two weeks before the proposal meeting unless all committee members agree to waive the two week period. Serious concerns about the readiness of the written proposal for a committee meeting must be shared, via email, with the committee at least 24 hours prior to the scheduled meeting. The meeting may be rescheduled at the discretion of the committee chair.
6. The dissertation proposal meeting should be scheduled for a 2-hour block, but may end early.
7. The candidate should then present an oral overview of the proposal that should last approximately 15 minutes. A brief literature review, rationale for and hypotheses of the study, methods, data analytic strategies, and preliminary data if available should be presented.
8. The great majority of the proposal meeting should focus on committee member questions for the candidate.
9. A final meeting among committee members without the candidate present should occur to make one of the following decisions:
  - a. Proceed with the dissertation study;
  - b. Proceed with the dissertation study with a list of changes to the proposal;

- c. Re-write aspects of the proposal and re-submit to committee members.
- d. Re-write aspects of the proposal and hold another proposal meeting;
- e. Hold another proposal meeting;
- f. Start on a new proposal.