

## **Notes on Preparing the Exposé for the Faculty-wide Presentation (FöP) of a Doctoral Project**

### **Preliminary Remark:**

Between the initial ideas and the actual writing of this scholarly work stands an Exposé, which serves to plan and structure the scientific work process. This Exposé is an independent document that must be prepared by the doctoral candidate and publicly presented within the faculty-wide presentations (FöP). The Exposé, excluding the bibliography, should not exceed 10 pages, with 1.5 line spacing. (see also <https://doktorat.univie.ac.at/en/phd-process/entry-phase/research-proposal/>)

### **The Exposé Consists of the following parts:**

1. Working title and subtitle of the planned dissertation
2. Research Topic and general research interest
3. State of the Art and research gap
4. Specific research interest and concrete research question(s)
5. Theoretical considerations
6. Methodological and methodical considerations
7. Ethical considerations (if relevant)
8. Preliminary timeline
9. Preliminary reflections on an alternative research plan (Plan B)
10. Bibliography

### **Explanations for the individual parts of the Exposé:**

#### **1. Working Title and Subtitle of the Planned Dissertation**

It is worthwhile to be very precise when choosing your title.

#### **2. Research Topic and General Research Interest**

At the beginning, describe the research field and the general research interest that guides you (in short: what you are interested in) and from which your research question(s) are derived (see point 4). Then explain what research has so far said about this general topic and to which field of study your work will contribute.

#### **3. State of the Art and Research Gap**

Here you should present what international research there has been so far on this topic. Point out where there is a research gap or a “blind spot.” It is important to define the nature of this research gap and to precisely specify the challenge you intend to address in your research project.

The goal is not to claim that this particular issue has never been addressed before, but to formulate and justify why this topic is relevant and of interest to (international) research. Your dissertation should always aim to make a contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

#### **4. Specific research interest and concrete research question(s)**

Based on the identified research gap or “blind spot,” you can now formulate your specific research interest and corresponding research question(s): What exactly do you want to know? To what broader context will your work contribute? Explain why this is important for educational research or subject didactics. These precise research question(s) form the core of any scholarly work, which essentially aims to answer them (methodically and logically). Alternatively, you may formulate precise thesis(es), i.e. making claims that you intend to prove (or falsify) in the course of your work (methodically and logically).

If you plan to write a cumulative dissertation, it is often useful to derive several specific research questions from one overarching question, which you can then address in different articles. However, this division does not need to be finalized for the Exposé presented in the FöP.

#### **5. Theoretical Considerations**

Some research projects are theory-driven from the outset that is, they aim to confirm, refine, or challenge certain hypotheses. After obtaining a general overview of the research field, you should ask which theoretical frameworks are most suitable and convincing for addressing your research question.

Theoretical frameworks function like a lens through which we can interpret and explain what we observe or study. Based on your research interest, identify and describe relevant theoretical foundations. For example, if you are interested in social inequality, look for theoretical approaches that shed light on how social inequality emerges and is reproduced. If your focus is on why certain ideas took hold at specific times, use theoretical tools that help explain the formation and transformation of discourses. See theory as a heuristic tool, a means to help you find answers rather than a rigid framework that restricts your research. In cumulative dissertations, different theoretical approaches may also be used or tested across the individual articles.

#### **6. Methodological and Methodical Considerations**

Your methodology, like your theoretical framework(s), depends on your research interest. What approach allows you to best engage with your research subject? What alternatives exist, and why do you choose one over another? In principle, methodology is the extension of theory: if theory is your lens to see more clearly, methodology determines how you adjust that lens (e.g., close-up, wide-angle). Methods, in turn, are the specific tools you use to make those adjustments.

“Method” therefore refers to everything you concretely plan to do to answer your research question (or to verify/falsify your hypothesis) in other words, how you will work. Explain which materials you will use (written sources/documents, images, objects, datasets, interviews, statistics) to address your question. A first step is to break down your main research question into sub-questions: what must you establish first in order to answer your main question at the end? You have already covered part of this by presenting the research state. Next, consider the scope of your dissertation: will you need to limit yourself to specific examples or case studies? Justify your selection of these examples or cases. Think carefully about what you need to know, in what order, and how you will proceed appropriately for your topic and how much primary and secondary literature or empirical data collection this will require.

Key terms that might appear in this section include research- and literature- or journal-review; image analysis; source or data collection; context analysis; discourse analysis; content analysis; interviews; questionnaires; statistical methods; data analysis tools (including AI-supported tools). In cumulative dissertations, the different articles often employ different methods.

## **7. Ethical Considerations (if relevant)**

In certain research projects, you must reflect on whether your research practices comply with ethical guidelines. This applies especially to studies involving fieldwork (e.g., participatory/non-participatory observation, interviews, surveys) or experiments in other words, any research involving human (or animal) participants. For other types of research, ethical considerations may still apply, for instance when handling sensitive or personal data, where mishandling could have negative consequences for the individuals involved. Depending on your materials, copyright issues may also be relevant (e.g., obtaining permission to reproduce certain images). Key questions to consider include:

- How does your research affect the participants involved? How do you ensure that your study does not physically, psychologically, or materially burden them (e.g., through interview questions, participation conditions, or grouping)?
- How can participants engage with your research? Do they have access to your insights and results, or are you writing “over their heads”?
- How do you handle and store your data? How do you ensure the anonymity and integrity of your participants?

If applicable, submit an application to the Ethics Committee of the University of Vienna. (more information on the application procedure to the Ethics Committee under <https://ethikkommission.univie.ac.at/en/application-procedure/>)

## **8. Preliminary timeline**

Create an approximate timeline in which you enter your planned activities and target (partial) results month-by-month or possibly semester-by-semester. Critically check: Does one activity build on another? How will you handle simultaneous demands? What are the milestones you want to reach each year? A graphic may be useful to represent this appropriately.

## **9. Preliminary considerations for an alternative research plan (Plan B)**

Consider which risks might be associated with your planned research project and how you could deal with setbacks. For example:

- Source research: What is the availability of sources? Are there alternative but comparable sources that could be used as a Plan B? If the sources are too extensive: is there a plan for how they could be narrowed down if necessary?
- Field research: How accessible is the field? Who are potential gatekeepers can you secure multiple access routes? Would a different field be possible if the first one fails?

## **10. Bibliography**

Finally, include a formally correct bibliography according to the scholarly citation guidelines of the relevant academic culture.

Vienna, October 2025