**Graduate Writing Coach**

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**Dissertation Prospectus Structure**

Here is a template for the individual sections that your dissertation prospectus should include, as well as an explanation of what each section should accomplish. Expectations for the format and length of your dissertation prospectus should be discussed with your advisor. They may also ask that you amend this structure to include other sections.

**Introduction** [background, social/real context, research question]

*What question are you asking about the topic you want to study? What about the real world has made you ask this question?*

* Introduce and contextualize the topic/problem/phenomenon you will be studying.
* Identify the specific research question(s) that your work will attempt to answer, clarifying why those questions are important to answer.

**Literature Review** [academic context, research gap/niche]

*What have other scholars said about this topic/question (or related topics/questions) and what are the consequences of the way this discussion has taken place? (e.g. Is there a research gap to be filled? Why is this existing scholarship unable to answer your specific research question?)*

* Organize and summarize scholarship about the topic you are studying and research question you want to answer.
* Identify what is missing-from or lacking-about the scholarship on this topic. If you don’t want to frame your research around a gap or deficit, make an argument about the state of existing scholarship (and its consequences) that you can use to justify your own research.

**Methodology** [data gathering, data analysis, theoretical framework, justification]

*Given your research question, and the state of existing scholarship, what are you going to do? How will you answer your research question and why is this the right way to do it?*

* Clarify your methods for gathering and analyzing data (your methods of argumentation). This may include explanations of how you will sample existing data sets or collect new data.
* Justify why you have chosen these methods. Compare or contrast your methods with those used by other scholars who have studied this topic/question.
* If necessary, articulate the theoretical presuppositions/framework that you are relying on.

**Conclusion/Significance** [importance, scope of expected contributions]

*Why is this work important? (Not just this kind of research, in general, but the specific question you are asking and the specific way you have chosen to answer your question?)*

* Regardless of what you find, how will this research contribute to (some or all of the following):
  + The broader empirical or theoretical contributions of your field.
  + A more nuanced understanding of your specific topic.
  + The methodological tools that scholars can use to study similar topics.
  + A better understanding-of or solution-to some real-world problem.

**Proposed Chapter Outline**

* Briefly describe the focus and purpose of each chapter.

**Timeline**

* Briefly describe the individual steps that you will take to complete your research and when you anticipate them being done.
  + If applicable, include notes about data gathering, analysis, writing, revisions, etc.
  + Suggest a proposed check-in schedule with your advisor or committee

**Sample Research Instruments** [if applicable]

* Examples of survey/interview questions
* IRB-related materials (check with your advisor)