

Guidelines for Writing a Doctoral Exposé
Research Proposal for Supervision Application
Chair of Refugee and Migration Studies

1. Purpose and Function of the Exposé

The exposé represents the conceptual foundation of a doctoral research project. It is intended to present the planned study clearly and coherently so that potential supervisors can gain an overview of the project and assess its relevance and feasibility. As it marks the beginning of the research process, the exposé does not need to contain a fully developed concept. Rather, it serves as a preliminary outline of the intended project and provides orientation for both the doctoral candidate and potential supervisors.

The reflections, questions, and theoretical as well as methodological considerations presented in the exposé are therefore not binding; they may and should evolve throughout the research process. Nonetheless, the exposé should demonstrate that a relevant research topic has been identified, that initial conceptual ideas have been developed, and that these can be presented in a coherent and comprehensible way.

The following guidelines outline aspects to consider when preparing an exposé at the Chair of Refugee and Migration Studies (KU). They are intended as orientation and support, not as binding formal requirements. The structure and focus of the exposé depend on the stage of the project, the thematic direction, and the doctoral candidate's specific research interests.

2. General Notes

Length:

As a general guideline, the exposé for a doctoral project should be between 10 and 15 pages in length.

Language and Style:

The exposé should be written in clear, correct, and consistent language, using an academic and objective style.

Academic Standards:

The exposé provides an overview of a planned research project and should therefore meet the standards of sound academic practice. Current scholarly literature must be included and cited correctly and consistently. Established citation styles (e.g., APA or Harvard) should be used. The exposé must include a reference list in which all sources cited in the text are listed consistently.

Formal Requirements:

The exposé should include a cover page with the working title of the project, the author's details, and the relevant information about the Chair. The document should include page numbers and, if applicable, a table of contents. For readability, it should be properly formatted (justified text, 1.5 line spacing, legible font such as Times New Roman, 12 pt).

Objective:

The exposé should provide an initial structured overview of the planned project and demonstrate that the doctoral candidate is capable of presenting a coherent—albeit preliminary—concept and of articulating the academic and/or societal relevance of the research.

3. Structure

The exposé should give an overview of the planned research project, outline the research interest and questions, and address the relevant theoretical and methodological frameworks. It should also include a presentation of the current state of research. The exact structure depends on the individual project and its stage of development.

Cover Page:

The cover page should include the working title, which may be preliminary but should already indicate the project's focus. It should also include the doctoral candidate's contact details and information about the Chair.

Introduction and Problem Statement:

The introduction should provide an overview of the planned doctoral project, outline the relevance of the topic, and clearly present the research interest and/or research question(s). Where applicable, hypotheses and guiding assumptions may also be included.

State of Research:

This section should demonstrate that the doctoral candidate possesses fundamental knowledge of the relevant research field, is familiar with key contributions, can identify research gaps, and is able to position the project within existing academic literature.

Theoretical Framework:

This section should provide an overview of the preliminary theoretical framework and show that the doctoral candidate has engaged with theories relevant to the research topic. It should address which theoretical approaches are considered relevant for answering the research question(s), how these approaches relate to the project's research interest, and how they may contribute to addressing the research question.

Methodology:

Similar to the theoretical framework, this section should describe the methods to be used in addressing the research question(s). The choice of methods may evolve during the research process, as may the theoretical orientation. The exposé should specify whether the project is empirical or theoretical and whether it will employ qualitative or quantitative approaches. For empirical projects, the exposé should indicate what kind of data will be used (e.g., interview transcripts, media texts), how the data will be generated (e.g., specific interview techniques, group discussions, surveys, corpus analyses), and which analytical methods appear most appropriate.

Work and Time Plan:

It is recommended to include a preliminary work and time plan. This helps assess the feasibility of the project and provides a time frame for both the doctoral candidate and the supervisor. The plan may include, for example, time periods for literature review, field access, data analysis, and theoretical development.

Preliminary Outline:

It is advisable to include a preliminary outline of the planned dissertation, listing its projected chapters. Such an outline demonstrates that initial conceptual ideas have been organised into a coherent and logical structure.

Bibliography:

The exposé should conclude with a bibliography listing all sources cited in the text. It is important to ensure that up-to-date scholarly literature has been used, that all sources are cited accurately and consistently, and that the reference list follows the conventions of good academic practice.