

Guidelines for Writing a Dissertation Proposal

Subject and Rationale:

This section should be 1-2 pages in length, and offer the background necessary for understanding your dissertation. It should present the subject—what is the dissertation about?—and a rationale: why this group of artists, between these dates, in this geographical region? If you have new or specialized terminology, this is the place to define terms. By the end of this section, the reader should also have encountered a thesis statement, indicating the overall position that your research will take. You don't need to get into detailed arguments here – that is for the chapter summaries.

Literature:

This section should be 1-2 pages in length and indicate significant prior research on the subject (books, dissertations, articles, conferences, exhibitions). You do not need to recap the arguments in these books. Instead, you are showing the reader that you understand what already exists out there, and that your approach will not be repeating this. If your research is interdisciplinary (most dissertations are), you will probably need a paragraph on the different bodies of literature you will be drawing on. This is also the place to indicate any methodological orientation relevant to the dissertation (e.g. postcolonial theory, feminism, political theory).

Proposed Contributions:

This section need only be 1-2 paragraphs. It is not a restatement of the argument, but concerns the *consequences* of your argument. How will your dissertation shift the field of art history to which your research pertains? In other words, what does your argument do to our understanding of your field (be this Italian art in the 60s, collage, Orientalism, Mexican architecture...)? It is insufficient to say that a subject has not been investigated before, or that there is no scholarship in English.

Outline of Dissertation:

Along with the Proposed Contribution, this is the hardest section to write. It is usually around 2 pages in length. You need to offer a paragraph summary of each chapter of the dissertation, plus the introduction and conclusion. In each chapter summary, it is important to state the argument, and the EC looks for concrete verbs like *argue*, *demonstrate*, and *contend* – rather than the giveaway vagueness of *explore*, *address*, and *assess*. Remember that an argument is something you can contest; it's not a point that most people agree upon. We know that this is a big ask, and that you have not yet visited the archives and done the reading. What we are looking for is a convincing work of fiction. Can you hypothesize a persuasive set of arguments? A line or two about the conclusion, while difficult to write, can indicate the arc of the dissertation as a whole and underscore the Proposed Contribution.

Plan of Research:

This need only be one paragraph, and it's basically about feasibility and time planning. Which libraries, archives, and collections do you need to visit, and where are they? Do you need to do interviews? You don't need to tell us what you have already done; the EC is interested in what lies ahead. Specify a timetable for research and writing, and a tentative completion date.