

East Asian Studies M.A. Thesis Proposal/Literature Review Guidelines

The thesis proposal/literature review is your statement of your research question, the rationale for your research, the theoretical and empirical background you are bringing to bear, your methodology, and your review of current debates on the subject. We suggest a five- to ten-page proposal, however, overall length, along with other details, should be determined through close consultation with your adviser. Your adviser will approve and sign the final version of your proposal before you turn it in to the CEAS office, using the attached form.

Proposals are due the quarter before the intended graduation quarter by the last day of classes at 5pm.

What should the proposal include?

i. Title and a brief discussion of the thesis topic

A general discussion of the topic is found in the introduction to the proposal, including your rationale for choosing this topic. This section frames the research question, and discusses its significance. This is a place for you to establish the themes which will run through the rest of your proposal.

ii. The research question

A proposal includes discussion of the main research question, how it was arrived at, and why it is important. In this section, you outline a specific research question (or questions) or area of inquiry which can be answered in the course of a one-year research project. Research questions often change while you are doing the research, but the value of articulating them early is that you will give your research focus and direction.

iii. Methodology

The methodology section is crucially important. It should explain how you are going to answer your research question. The nature of the methodology section varies quite a lot, depending on the methodology chosen. A quantitative project will require detailed discussion of sampling, issues of reliability and validity, data collection methods, analysis, and so forth. Qualitative projects may give more attention to epistemological assumptions or ethics.

iv. Feasibility

The feasibility section will address some or all of the following issues, depending on topic and research strategy:

- How relevant primary documents will be acquired and analyzed
- How permission or assistance will be acquired from gatekeepers to the research
- How participants will be found and recruited
- How sampling will take place
- Plans relating to analysis of research material
- Limitations and potential problems
- Who will have access to research results and how will you make them available?
- A timeline for completion of the project
- Budget and required resources
- Provisional outline of thesis chapters – this will be very speculative at this stage and does not commit you to writing under these headings

v. Literature Review

Not to be confused with a book review, a literature review surveys scholarly articles, books and other sources (e.g. dissertations, conference proceedings) relevant to a particular issue, area of research, or theory, providing a short description, summary, and critical evaluation of each work. The literature review itself, however, does not present new primary scholarship. The purpose is to offer an overview of significant literature published on a topic. The literature review incorporates four types of items:

- Conceptual or theoretical sources that provide a framework for approaching the problem;
- Empirical research relevant to the topic;
- Primary sources that you will use;
- Methodological literature.

The idea of the literature review is not to incorporate everything you have ever read on the topic, but to elaborate the basis for your research questions, to highlight the assumptions you are bringing to the research and the reasons for them, and to point out what research has already been done on the topic so you can show how your project fits into the wider scheme of the field. The format of this literature review is similar to an annotated bibliography—a listing entry with a short description after it.

vi. References/Bibliography

Your proposal will need a list of references. You do not have to provide a comprehensive bibliography. The reference list usually ranges from 12-40 items of all types, including websites, newspaper articles, and other theses. This may or may not include sources not already listed in the literature review section.



CENTER FOR EAST ASIAN STUDIES
STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Instructions: In consultation with your adviser, fill out the information below, obtain your adviser's approval signature for your thesis proposal/literature review, and turn in the form and proposal to CEAS no later than the last day of classes (by 5pm) of the quarter prior to the quarter in which you intend to graduate.

Student Name:

Adviser Name:

Region of focus:

Tentative Thesis Title:

Intended Graduation Quarter and Year:

Does this thesis involve human subjects?

If yes, please provide the IRB approval number:

Please list a date or N/A for each item below

(Mandatory) Thesis 1st Draft Due Date:

No later than end of the 5th week of classes of graduation qtr.

(Optional) Thesis 2nd Draft Due Date:

(Optional) Thesis 3rd Draft Due Date:

(Optional) Thesis 4th Draft Due Date:

*** To be signed by adviser after meeting with student ***

I have reviewed and approve the attached thesis proposal/literature review for the student named above. This project is of an appropriate topic and scope for a Master's thesis in East Asian Studies. I have also discussed thesis draft deadlines with the student, as outlined above.

Adviser Signature

Date