

Thesis Structure Workshop

Key Concepts

- Generating an effective outline for your final thesis
- Using that outline to help you draft your proposal

I. Structure → Generating an effective outline for converting your status report into a final report

This exercise requires you to analyze published Public Policy Theses as models for your work. You can access the published theses at

<https://publicpolicy.stanford.edu/publications>

Select a thesis to analyze and move step-by-step through the following analysis activities.

Analysis:

What sections and subheads do you see? What sections and subheads might work for your project? For example,

Introduction and/or Context

Literature Review and/or Historical Trends

Modeling and/or Theories

Methodology

Results and/or Data Analysis

Discussion and Conclusion

Appendices

Keep in mind that what sections you include will depend upon the type of research that you do. Think about your study design and ask yourself, are you doing more descriptive research (*what* is going on?) or explanatory research (*why* is something going on?)? Is your approach more quantitative or qualitative in nature? Knowing your type of research and approach will help you envision what sections you will need to include for your audience.

Anticipate data visualization. What research elements might you include as charts, tables, or info-graphics? Note that you can use these graphics in your thesis presentation slides as well.

- a.
- b.
- c.

References: What materials do you plan to list to show completed research? By plotting out your appendices and bibliography, you can determine the research you still need to do.

Appendices

Sources cited or consulted

Now, using a whiteboard, piece of paper, or google doc, order the sections above and generate an outline for your thesis that will also help you begin writing the proposal.

Looking Ahead: Writing the Proposal

What the thesis proposal *is*: A thesis proposal is a **tool** to help you make your first strategic moves and tackles on your project. Writing the thesis proposal is a great exercise in helping you articulate your research question, think critically about how you will answer your question, organize your anticipated sections, and even do some preliminary research. It will also help you garner the interest of your advisor and help him or her guide you by asking the right questions and pushing back against some of your assumptions.

What the thesis proposal *is not*: The thesis proposal is not a mini thesis. Although you can use the thesis structural outline you have just created to start thinking, writing a proposal does not require that you have all the answers or know exactly how you will research your question or what dataset you will use.

Use the outline you have just created and begin by filling in the introduction or context section. Free write. What do you already know about your topic? What sources are you relying on to supply you with the background on your topic? Now, compose that difficult and critical question (as a question!) that you will be answering with your research. Then, schedule a time with your advisor or talk to your 200H instructor about your next moves.