

Exposé

The goals of the exposé are 1) to convince your audience of the merits of your research project and 2) to set clear expectations for what you will achieve in your research and how you will do it. Typically, the exposé is required to apply to a graduate program or to apply for grants and other research funding, but your professor may require it as preparation for writing a thesis. In this case, it serves as an **agreement on the topic** and as a means of obtaining **feedback** on the initial plans and direction for a project. By composing an exposé, you achieve critical milestones in your writing project: you establish its **scope and structure**, complete necessary **preliminary research**, and plan the next stages of the **writing process** (see Frank et al. 2007: 145.)

Structure and content of an exposé

The content and especially the structure of an exposé can vary depending on the context and audience, which is why writers should always inform themselves about specific requirements. However, the essential purpose and therefore key aspects of an exposé remain consistent. As a rule, the following is likely to be expected:

1. Presentation and justification of the research project
 - Introduction to the topic—establishes why *this* topic is important and in need of study.
 - Review of relevant research (i.e., “state of the art”)—synthesizes key literature, but also points out problems, gaps, and/or possibilities for extending existing research.
 - Motivation for the research project—explanation of why the project is significant to its academic field: Does it fill a gap in knowledge? Does it help answer a question that others have asked or help solve a common problem? Does it correct an oversight, misunderstanding, or error in the existing literature? Does it extend incomplete research or contribute support to a theory or argument?
 - Research question(s).
 - Objective(s) of the project and expected results, or a nascent argument.¹
 - A justified methodological, theoretical approach.
2. Outline
3. Work plan/timeline
 - Breaks down the thesis into phases, estimates duration of each phase.
 - Deadline(s)
4. Working bibliography

Depending on the context, you might need to include further information, like:

- Experience and previous work of the author.
- Budget (e.g., costs for archive visits or travel related to the project).

¹ This varies by discipline and the nature of the project. In the social and natural sciences, where researchers often carry out original experiments, one presents his/her research objective(s) and hypothesis/es. In the humanities, one’s “results” are one’s argument, so an exposé may explore or suggest directions for such an argument.

Notes on the process for creating an exposé

Because an exposé should offer readers insight into the planned content of a project, sufficient time must be planned for the initial research and reading process. However, not too much time should be invested in this preparation stage: the exposé should only be comprehensive enough to give the audience the “big picture” version of your project and to convince them of its merits. How much time you will need to achieve this depends on the scale of your project. It is helpful to discuss this with an advisor.

If your professor or lecturer has assigned an exposé, they are looking for you to showcase your existing knowledge of the research topic. They have likely assigned the exposé not only because they want you to clearly declare your intentions but also so that you can become more fluent in and informed about your chosen topic. They are evaluating whether you can:

- argue the relevancy of your question and research objectives,
- review and assess the relevant academic discourse on the research topic,
- and design a suitable research plan for answering your proposed objectives.

Remember: the exposé serves as a “provisional sketch” of your project (Frank et al. 2007: 147). You will likely make changes to this sketch as you write, continue to read, and negotiate your project with an advisor—this is the nature of research, and it is nothing to be worried about when your plans evolve.

Literatur:

Fischer, Simone: *Erfolgreiches wissenschaftliches Schreiben*, Stuttgart 2015, pp. 17-19.

Lehmann, Günter: *Wissenschaftliche Arbeiten: Zielwirksam verfassen und präsentieren*, Renningen 2008, pp. 65-67.

Frank, Andrea/Haacke, Stefanie/Lahm, Swantje: *Schlüsselkompetenzen. Schreiben in Studium und Beruf*. Stuttgart 2007, pp. 145-150.

Worksheet concept: Goethe University Frankfurt a. M. Writing Center.