

## International Relations/Political Science Department Guidelines for the *Mémoire Préliminaire de Thèse*

The *Mémoire Préliminaire de Thèse* (MPT) should demonstrate the following: (i) the student is knowledgeable about both the broad aspects and fine details of a particular body of scholarly literature; (ii) that s/he has the ability to ask a research question relevant to that literature, to broader issues in the discipline, and to noteworthy aspects of international relations and/or domestic politics; and (iii) to formulate a research design which, if competently executed, will aid in answering the research question and suggesting avenues of further inquiry. Concretely, students should submit a document the body of which is between 20,000 to 25,000 words including footnotes but excluding the bibliography and any appendices. While there is no formulaic, one-size fits all design for the MPT, each of the elements listed below are necessary, albeit with varying emphasis:

1. An **introduction** that clearly states the research question(s) and objective(s) as well as the types of theoretical/conceptual contributions it will make to the literature. It is advisable to begin with a big question and narrow it to manageable scope in your research design.
2. A **literature review** that demonstrates how the question relates to the existing literature, commenting specifically on how others have addressed the same (or similar) question in the past and where prior contributions fall short of providing a satisfactory answer. The literature review should not be overly lengthy, and should be done in an argumentative and focused, rather than as a descriptive list of relevant studies.
3. A **theoretical** section that defines core concepts and clearly explains how you intend to answer the research question. The section should specify and justify the methodological approach taken; i.e. it should discuss whether a positivist, critical realist, analytical, reflexivist or other approach best suits the question. Depending on approach, it should develop the necessary tools of analysis (hypotheses, mechanisms, ideal-types, meanings, elements of discourse, etc.)
4. A **research design** section that defines how are you going to conduct research on this topic. The section should do the following: clearly demarcate the scope of your research; define the unit(s) of analysis; justify the preliminary selection of cases (if appropriate); discuss and justify the methods of analysis (detailed case or comparative cases, large-N, surveys, experimental, interpretive, de-constructive, multi-methods, etc.); specify how are things going to be measured or what evidence would effectively support or negate a particular argument, and whether the same evidence may be explained by a different theoretical perspective, etc. Be prepared to reflect on both the limitations and strengths of the selected methodology.
5. A section that reflects on the **feasibility and ethical considerations** of the research. What resources are likely to be necessary to gather information, and what does the calendar of proposed work look like over the next 30 months. Are archives available, is the question too sensitive politically for field research, could this research endanger the researcher or the subjects?
6. A draft **chapter** or **paper-based outline** of the thesis. If appropriate, it is also useful to conduct a preliminary **pilot study** of the research to assess the feasibility of the design and methods—a proof of concept.

The defense of the MPT will last approximately an hour and will involve initial remarks by the student, not to exceed 10 minutes, followed by questions from the examiners about the MPT and the issues it raises.