

International Relations and Political Science Department

Preliminary Thesis Dissertation / Mémoire Préliminaire de Thèse

Jun 2024

The *Mémoire Préliminaire de Thèse* (MPT) should demonstrate that the candidate: (i) is knowledgeable about both the broad aspects and fine details of a particular body of scholarly literature; (ii) 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) can formulate a research programme which, if competently executed, will answer the research question and suggest avenues of further inquiry. Concretely, students should submit a document of between 20,000 to 25,000 words (excluding notes, bibliography and any appendices). While there is no formulaic, one-size fits all design for the MPT, 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 relevant 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, discussing specifically 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 also demonstrate thorough knowledge of the relevant scholarly field(s) or subfields in which the proposed thesis topic is situated, and should be presented in an argumentative and focused fashion, 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 theoretical, epistemological and methodological approach adopted. Depending on approach, it should develop and explain the analytic tools proposed (hypotheses, mechanisms and process tracing, ideal-types, ethnography, case studies, discourse analysis, etc.)
4. A **research design** section that defines how the research on this topic will be conducted. It should clearly demarcate the scope of the research; define the unit(s) of analysis; justify the case or preliminary selection of cases (if appropriate); discuss and justify the methods of analysis (e.g.: detailed case or comparative cases, large-N, interpretive, post-structuralist, discursive, ethnographic, survey, experimental, multi-method, etc.); specify what evidence or measurement strategy (broadly defined) 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 required to gather relevant information, and what is the calendar

of proposed work for the subsequent 30 months? Are archives, data or documents available, is the question a sensitive one for field research, could this research endanger the researcher or the subjects?

6. A draft outline for a **chapter-based** or **paper-based** 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 (10 minutes maximum), followed by questions from the examiners regarding the literature covered, the research proposed, and the broader issues it raises.