

Application for an individual doctorate at Goethe University

How to find a supervisor and write an exposé

Please note: The recommendations and tips compiled in this document refer mostly to individual doctorates in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Cultural Studies. Doctoral positions in Natural Sciences and Life Sciences are usually only allocated to doctoral projects that have already been approved (project & finance secured). Therefore, as a rule it is not required to write an exposé for a doctorate in these fields. You should check with the relevant faculty if an exposé is desired.

1. Getting information and making first contact with the professor

The **first thing you must do** is to find a professor who will supervise your doctorate at Goethe University. This primary supervisor will accompany and support you as you work on your thesis. It is advisable to find a second person to act as co-supervisor; often your primary supervisor can recommend someone for this position.

Professors do not have all that much time to supervise doctorates. Therefore, they will choose their doctoral candidates and their projects carefully, according to whether these fit with their own research interests. As a result, you should take great care when selecting a potential supervisor and prepare the first contact diligently.

Perhaps during the final phase of your studies you already got to know a professor at Goethe University whose research topics are within your own area of interest so that you can personally engage with him or her.

Or perhaps the professor who is supervising your final thesis at your home university can recommend you to a professor at Goethe University and so help make direct contact. Check with your home university about this.

Getting information in advance

- It is important that your planned doctoral project fits neatly into the potential primary supervisor's field of research and research topics.
- Make sure to get detailed information about
 - their research profile and career
 - research content and topics
 - current publications
 - on-going as well as completed research projects

Tip: A lot of this information is available on the professors' pages on the Goethe University's website

- Go to the professors' website or to the Goethe University course catalogue (<https://qis.server.uni-frankfurt.de/>) to find out what lectures or seminars they offer during the semester. These pages may also may provide background information about the content of their research and their research profile; sometimes the reading lists for the lectures are available online.

Making first contact

Once you have selected a professor who you would like to be your doctoral supervisor, it is recommended to **contact them in person by email**. This email should make clear why your doctoral project specifically might be interesting for his or her current research, thus creating interest in your planned project.

Given that the faculties receive hundreds of emails per day, it is important to:

- Include the word “doctorate“ (in German: “Promotion“) prominently in the subject line
- Introduce yourself briefly in the email (CV) and
- Add a brief description of the content of your planned thesis, or if you already have an exposé (see below) add that. If in doubt, ask the faculty whether an exposé is required;
- Give some information about the topic of your Master’s thesis (or other equivalent university degree) and
- List previous publications or collaboration in research projects, if applicable.
- List topics / methods / technologies that you would like to work on and learn about

Further tips:

- You can also ask the professor whether s/he might have topics s/he would like a doctoral candidate to work on. However, it is important that first, you mention your interest in specific doctoral topics so that the professor can gauge where your thematic interests lie.
- Make sure to avoid the impression that you haven’t given sufficient thought to a possible doctoral project because otherwise the professor may consider your request insufficiently researched or not specific enough.
- If you are already in Frankfurt or in Germany, you can also come to the professors’ consulting hours (these are usually offered once per week – you can find dates and times on the home page of the faculty or institute) to explain your request for personal supervision of your doctorate in a personal interview. However, it is usually easier for a professor to read a concisely worded email and so get a first impression of you and your proposed project.
- If you haven’t received a reply to your email after one week, you can send a friendly reminder by email.

2. Writing an exposé – general guidelines

An exposé is a short text with a brief description of the research project for your doctorate. As a rule, it comprises the issue to be researched and the current state of relevant scientific knowledge as well as a description of the envisaged methods to be employed, aims and fundamental hypotheses.

The exposé for your planned doctoral project should make clear why your topic and project specifically might be of relevance for the professor and his or her current research.

You should take great care when writing your exposé – it offers your potential supervisor a first impression of your academic capabilities.

Furthermore, the exposé is the basis for further cooperation between you and the professor and will be the focal point of your first personal interview, when you will discuss concrete issues and positions regarding the exposé and your planned doctoral project.

The Humanities and Social Sciences faculties in particular usually require an exposé for your application as doctoral candidate, provided a professor has agreed to supervise your work. The exposé will be assessed by the faculty's doctoral committee.

Please note:

- There is no authoritative model of how to write an exposé. The requirements differ from faculty to faculty. However, there are some clear guidelines you should always bear in mind. We have compiled these here¹ for you.
- Once you have written a first draft of your exposé, your professor will support you in further elaborating it so that you have a viable exposé for your doctoral project. This you can then submit to your faculty's doctoral committee.
- **Please note** that the drafting and fine-tuning of an exposé for your intended doctoral project may take several weeks or even months.
- It may be possible for you to participate in a colloquium for doctoral students and in your supervising professor's on-going research project. Ask your professor.

¹ Der Inhalt orientiert sich in Auszügen an dem Originaltext von Hellmann, G.
Das Exposé einer wissenschaftlichen Qualifikationsarbeit, PDF-Datei (siehe dazu:
<http://www.unifrankfurt.de/fb3/hellmann/mat/WA-Expose.pdf>),

How do I write the exposé?

a) The exposé for a work of academic qualification comprises the **content** and **methodology** of the planned research project and is a standard feature of academic work.

An exposé aims to formulate a clear and problem-oriented question that will be further elaborated in the course of the planned doctoral project. The exposé should comprise:

- What is your **thematic scope**? What is your research question, related to the thematic scope? How does this question appear as adequately original or *open* in the sense that the answer is not obvious?
- **Tip:** For your orientation, check the publication list and recommended reading list for your professor's lectures and seminars in the current semester, as well as information about his or her current research projects. Write to your professor personally and ask him for further reading recommendations to deepen your understanding.
- The exposé should offer a good **overview of the content** of the themes you are interested in. It should also state which current academic and or social or political development triggered this research question.
- The exposé comprises the current **state of research** in relation to your chosen question. Ask yourself: what existing research and what sources are there already and how can you describe the current state of research to which you intend to contribute with your doctoral project?
- The exposé also describes **theoretical positions** and justifies the methodology you want to employ as basis of your research project. How do you want to find an answer to your specific research question, which methods and processes do you want to employ, how is your research designed? Is it possible to answer your research question in a controlled and methodically reflected manner?
- The exposé presents the **individual phases of the research project** by way of a **structured schedule** describing in detail how the project will be developed and executed. How exactly do you intend to go about your research?

b) When writing your exposé, make sure you not only elaborate your thematic aim but also follow the **standard rules for academic work**, such as citation format and referencing your sources. Furthermore, you must comply with the requirements for writing an exposé.

- Check your professor's home page for tips and specific requirements for an exposé, as well as the home page of your faculty's examination office.
- If these searches do not yield information, there are general standard works such as the book "*Schlüsselkompetenzen – Schreiben in Studium und Beruf*", or you can check out the links and recommended literature listed below.

3. Recommended reading; writing classes

This section lists recommended reading for writing your exposé for a work of academic qualification, some of which are authored by professors at Goethe University:

Recommended reading

- Hellmann, G.: *Das Exposé einer wissenschaftlichen Qualifikationsarbeit*, PDF-Datei
www.fb03.uni-frankfurt.de/57532473/WA-Expose1.pdf
- Brühl, T.: *Hinweise zur Erstellung von Exposés für Abschlussarbeit / Dissertation* PDF-Datei
www.fb03.uni-frankfurt.de/50072404/expose_abschluss.pdf
- Frank, A. / Haacke, S. / Lahm, S. 2007: *Schlüsselkompetenzen – Schreiben in Studium und Beruf*. Stuttgart

Writing classes and workshops

Please note that the courses listed here are mostly available only for **students enrolled at** Goethe University. If you are studying at a different university, please check there for relevant courses. Most universities offer similar courses.

The Goethe University's **Goethe Research Academy for Early Career Researchers "GRADE"** offers regular **writing courses for exposés** during the semester:

www.goethe-university-frankfurt.de/54290839/400_Academic_Tools

Likewise, the **Writing Centre** within the **Methodology Centre "Starker Start ins Studium"** at Goethe University offer advice and courses for writing an exposé:

www.starkerstart.uni-frankfurt.de/43403430/schreibzentrum

4. Information for international doctoral candidates on how to apply at Goethe University Frankfurt am Main

Please visit our website for international students:

>> www.goethe-university-frankfurt.de/67109583/300_Doctorate