

How to Write a Proposal for a BA or MA Thesis

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Requirements for Supervision I am happy to supervise BA and MA theses, as long as they meet two requirements:

1. The topic of your thesis should be related to the Politics of Money. That is, it should investigate how politics shape issues of investment, finance, trade, or debt, and how these issues are in turn shaping politics. A list of possible topics is available upon request. However, feel free to suggest any topic related to Politics and Money.
2. The thesis cannot be merely a theoretical discussion of a particular topic. Instead, it must include a empirical component. That may be a qualitative case study, a quantitative analysis, archival research, or any other empirical approach that allows for evaluating/testing your argument.

The Process Please contact me prior to writing your proposal to check whether your chosen topic is a potential fit. Only once we have agreed on a topic you can begin writing your thesis proposal following the instructions below. After you submitted your proposal, we will discuss whether it is still a good fit and, if necessary, make adjustments to your plan for the thesis. Further, we agree on a timetable for the completion of your thesis. Only then you start writing your thesis.

The Thesis Proposal Your proposal should be no more than 2000 Words and contain the following sections:

- **A puzzle** Your work on your thesis begins with identifying the variation you want to explain. This can be achieved by introducing a particular puzzle involving actors (such as countries, firms, politicians, etc.) that made diverging decisions when faced with the same situation. Puzzles concern variation in outcomes (e.g. “why did peace hold in Mozambique, but not in Angola, even though they found themselves in very similar situations?”). A puzzle may arise from comparing two units of analysis at the same time, such as two countries that have taken divergent paths despite very similar preconditions. Puzzles may also arise by observing units of analysis over time, such as actors that suddenly change actions or strategies seemingly contradicting their previous patterns of behavior.
- **Your research question** You should then derive a research question from the puzzle you identified in the first step. Make sure that your research question is an analytic question, not a descriptive question. Descriptive research attempts to describe or identify what is, while analytical research attempts to establish *why* it is that way. The descriptive research uses description, classification, measurement, and comparison to describe what phenomena are. The analytical research usually concerns itself with cause-effect relationships. For your thesis, you must propose

an analytic, not descriptive, research question. As a general rule, ‘why’-questions are preferable to ‘how’ or ‘what’-questions. For example, asking “How did the US international trade balance fluctuate during the past decade?” is an example of a descriptive research question. In contrast, “Why did the US trade balance continuously deteriorate over time despite economic growth during the same period?” is an example of an analytical research question.

- **Preliminary overview over existing explanations** Please provide a brief overview over existing explanations to your research question. No need for a lengthy literature review at this point, but I do want you to have an understanding of the work that has already attempted to address this question.
- **Summary of your explanation** You should briefly introduce your (preliminary) answer to the research question. Here you introduce your explanation as to why we observe the variation in the outcome. Importantly, you must make this argument first in the abstract (“I propose that factor X can explain why abc happens”). In a second step, you should illustrate your explanation with reference to the puzzle that motivated your introduction (“Factor X was present in one country which is why it did ABC. However, factor X was absent in the other country, which is why it did not do ABC.”).
- **Plan for empirical tests** You should summarize the kind of evidence you plan to present in support of your argument. Briefly tell the reader what you are planning to do (e.g. a qualitative case study, a statistical analysis, a survey experiment, etc.) and what findings you expect.
- **Your skills** Please provide a brief assessment as to why you have the skills to write this thesis, and why I am the right person to supervise your thesis.