

Honours Essay Prospectus Form

Return completed form (in digital copy) signed by the supervisor(s) and reader, to the Romance Studies Associate Head by the end of the fourth full week of the term in which the essay is being written.

Student name:		Student number:	
Instructor's name:			
Session/Term:		<input type="checkbox"/> 3 credits	
Date:			

Prospectus (250-500 words)

APPROVAL REQUEST

<hr/> Student Name (print)	<hr/> Signature	<hr/> Date
<hr/> Supervisor Name (print)	<hr/> Signature	<hr/> Date
<hr/> Reader Name (print)	<hr/> Signature	<hr/> Date
<hr/> RMST Associate Head Name (print)	<hr/> Signature	<hr/> Date

What is a Prospectus:

Your prospectus can include an abstract summarizing the subject or topic, description of the structure and argument, background and significance of research, a short literature review or annotated bibliography, a description of the preliminary work you have completed, an explanation of your method or approaches, potential limitations.

A prospectus presents a **SUBJECT OR TOPIC** in the form of questions or problems, often coupled with tentative answers or hypotheses. It outlines how the questions and problems will be addressed (what is sometimes called critical approach or methodology), and its annotated bibliography offers a brief guide to pertinent materials, their relative importance and particular value. The idea is to receive advice early on in the process. By articulating the central issues in your project as you see them (of course, they might change), you'll begin to see how much detail you can define and address. You need to have made some serious, preliminary decisions.

A prospectus requires a good, preliminary title, preferably descriptive and straightforward – titles are important and formative – and it needs to give a clear sense of the scope of your project. Scope largely means the specific texts to be covered. You need to find roughly the right amount of material for your topic and approach: there should be room for ideas to grow, but they can't get out of hand. Not all theses are best framed as questions in final practice, though questions are useful to start. You might already have tentative answers to these questions, some hypothesis or hunch about explanations or judgments. Putting those into prose as early as you can—at whatever stage of your writing—is vital. Beginning with your prospectus, the writing and revising comes in stages and is more or less continual.

A prospectus also describes a **STRUCTURE**, which almost always has a first part that introduces or defines your topic, then two (or perhaps three) sections, and sometimes a separate conclusion (often with its own title). It's helpful to indicate how you will distribute ideas and texts across your study.

The whole of an Honours Essay should be greater than the sum of its parts. You're not connecting shorter essays, but rather working towards an integrated whole. It's worth thinking now about how to articulate your structure to make that happen. Consider ways to break your essay into **SECTIONS**, on which you can work separately, both for ease of writing, and to push yourself towards a clearer, progressive **ARGUMENT**. Outlining, or at least making a list of points for each section or part, invariably helps. So too is keeping a list of keywords you find yourself repeatedly borrowing from other writers or inventing yourself.

A prospectus describes a **METHODOLOGY or CRITICAL APPROACH**. For example, what counts as "evidence" in this thesis, and what are the principles or criteria for interpreting this evidence? Much criticism involves close reading of individual or paired texts. The evidence in these essays often treats different kinds of patterns – stylistic, generic, formal, thematic, or a combination of these. You should know something about the tradition or genre of the texts you are writing about. You should research their history and how they fit into the career of their author(s) and their cultural moment. You should also read the books and essays that helped define your field. Seek out critical works you see frequently cited by other critical works, and ask your advisor "What book or essay shaped how people today look at this work/author/period/genre/problem?"

A prospectus needs an annotated **BIBLIOGRAPHY**. List and describe your main texts (books, articles, etc.) and any other less central texts you feel are important. You should also list and describe helpful books and articles that discuss your texts, authors, and genres in their historical context, or that set out the large framework (e.g., “reader response theory,” “feminist theory,” “genre theory,” “environmental studies,” “theology,”) in which you plan to situate them. Finally, you need to find relevant books and articles that analyze the texts you are writing about in ways you hope to engage. You’re joining a conversation with others about the texts you all have been examining, and you should position your own voice in relation to their voices. This approach can inform your brief summaries of critical texts as you annotate them in your bibliography.

Finally, a prospectus does not need to have all the answers to its own questions. It is better to lay out issues and concerns you intend to explore in writing the Honours Essay than to pretend to have already solved all the problems. Think of it as a serious hypothesis, a preliminary blueprint.