

## **Instructions for the preparation of an exposé for a final thesis with Prof. Dr. Paul Drews**

**P. Drews, February 2024**

The objective of this text is to assist students in preparing an exposé for their final thesis (Bachelor's thesis, Master's thesis). For theses written at Prof. Dr. Paul Drews, it is usually expected that such a document is prepared at the beginning of the supervision process.

The following content should be understood as a recommendation, which summarizes the experiences from supervising numerous theses in the past. The currently valid examination regulations and program-specific annexes (FSA) for Bachelor's and Master's programs at Leuphana University of Lüneburg do not demand a preparation of an exposé. This means that it is not necessary to submit the exposé with the registration of the thesis.

### **What is an exposé and why is it helpful?**

An exposé is essentially a written statement of the goals, tasks and the process of writing a thesis. It contains all the information necessary to get an overview of the project. A thesis usually exceeds the scope (number of pages, scope of tasks, literature) and duration (several weeks or months) of all previous tasks in your studies.

From the first preliminary discussions to the submission, there are usually several meetings with the supervisor at the university. In these meetings, ideas are exchanged, a topic is determined and the research process is discussed. The exposé should help to record the contents that emerged in these conversations. During the oral discussion, there is often a feeling that a common understanding has been reached. Later, it sometimes turns out that what was said was partly understood differently. Especially in the early phase of topic identification and planning, it is helpful to record what has been discussed in a document. It is the student's task to write the exposé while the supervisor provides feedback. Above all, however, it should also help to formulate one's own thoughts and goals for the thesis and to get to the point. Vague ideas and areas of interest need to be concretized to clear tasks, a systematic approach, and a timeline.

### **What do I do if developments arise during the work that were not foreseen and captured in the exposé?**

Once the exposé has been written, it is a kind of "contractual basis" for the parties involved (students, supervisors, reviewers, possibly partners from practice like enterprises). The exposé provides a framework for their actions. Deviations from the path described in the exposé are always possible, since the knowledge gained (e.g., from the literature, from empirical studies, or during conception/design) may necessitate a change in the activities and tasks. If deviations are necessary, you should contact the supervisor(s) to discuss and to clarify how to deal with them.

### **What should I consider when working with a partner from practice?**

Whenever a partner from practice is involved in the thesis project, we particularly recommend that you prepare an exposé. In this case, you will not only have to coordinate your thesis with the supervisors at the university, but also with one or more persons at the practice partner. In some cases, practice partners also expect a coordinated exposé before the collaboration begins. Before you start working on your thesis, you should have the exposé approved by both parties. The reason for collaborating with a practice partner is often that they grant you access to certain material, support you in finding interview partners, or plan to hold a workshop with you. In any case, you should describe this necessary support (at least roughly) in the exposé. The partner from practice then also formally assure to provide the support mentioned in the exposé.



## **When do I have to prepare the exposé and how do I get the contents?**

The request to write an exposé is usually made by the supervisor at an appropriate point in the supervision process. There should already be more than an initial idea or a broad topic. However, the exposé can and should also develop, so it does not have to be available in its final version right away.

The main task to be accomplished by the student is to read the relevant literature on the topic. This makes it possible to position the thesis in the current scientific context and build upon relevant existing work. The research task or research question of the thesis is developed together with the supervisor. Formulating this correctly requires some experience and is often a focal point for discussions between the supervisor and the student. The preparation of the time schedule depends strongly on the chosen approach. For example, if there is a phase in which interviews are to be conducted, these must be prepared by studying the relevant literature. In design-oriented projects, development and evaluation activities are required, which also take some time. The schedule must take these dependencies into account and should be sketched as a small project plan.

## **What is the scope of an exposé and what points should it contain?**

An exposé usually has a length of 2-5 pages. At an early stage, it may only include one page, which will be extended and revised later. If the time schedule, outline, and literature are added, the length may exceed three pages. However, the exposé should not be too lengthy. It should clearly address the essential points listed below. Linguistic vagueness and imprecise sentences are often also a consequence of a lack of clarity in the structuring of thoughts, objectives and content.

An exposé usually contains the following points:

1. Introduction
2. Motivation (for science/practice)
3. Research question or research task
4. Related research
5. Method and approach
6. Intended results / types of results
7. Time schedule
8. Outline
9. Literature

To 1 (Introduction): The exposé starts with brief introduction to the topic. Which societal / economic / technical challenges form an overarching reference for your own work? In which research field do you position your thesis? Here, you should write from the general to the concrete, i.e. you start with the broader area of interest / research field and break it down to the concrete area of interest for your thesis.

To 2 (Motivation): The motivation should clarify which problems are addressed or for which problems you seek to develop a contribution. Which advantages could be achieved with the help of the gained insights or solutions? Where and why do you want to make a contribution?

To 3 (Research question or task): An essential part of the exposé is the research question or the research task. In scientific papers, the task is often formulated in the form of a question, to which the answer should then be provided at the end of the paper. Many papers have a main question and sometimes a few sub-questions. Sub-questions might describe intermediate results on the way to answering the main question. Formulating appropriate questions requires some experience. To bring them into their final form often requires the support of the supervisor. In general, the problem definition should be closely coordinated with the supervisor. With the question or task, a preliminary decision is often also made for the demand of the work. In other words: There are easier and more demanding tasks. Clarify with your supervisor the expectations regarding the degree of difficulty of your work.

To 4 (Scientific classification / essential preliminary work): In this section, you position your research question in the scientific field and context. The classification can also move from the general to the concrete: first locate the work in a broad topic and then show connections to sub-areas of this topic. Every scientific paper and thesis builds on preliminary work. In the exposé, you must first and foremost show which are the essential preliminary works for your paper (focus on the most relevant papers

instead of including too many with only little overlap with your topic). In the phase of analyzing the literature, these references will be expanded and perhaps the focus of your thesis will change. However, you should already show relatively clearly in the preparation of the exposé in which thematic environment you position your work.

To 5 (Method and approach): Every scientific work should be based on a systematic method. When planning your research approach, you should refer to established scientific methods. These methods incorporate the knowledge of many years of research experience and you should draw upon them to avoid mistakes that others have made earlier. Theses sometimes use different methods in the different phases and chapters (e.g. literature analysis, qualitative-empirical study, data analysis, conception, evaluation). In the exposé, you should concisely describe which research paradigm your thesis is based on (e.g., design science) and clarify how you intend to use certain methods to answer the sub-questions of your thesis. In bachelor theses, a rough classification or references to basic methods and a description of the planned use of the methods is often sufficient. In master theses, detailed explanations of the methodological approach are expected.

To 6 (Intended results and types of results): Of course, you do not know the results at the beginning of your work. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to think about possible results at the beginning. A model, a theory, a prototype? What should it approximately contain in order to contribute to answering the question? Will an existing model or theory be extended or do you plan to develop a new one? What basic concepts, levels, elements, etc. must it contain? Try to define the deliverables of your thesis. What type of results is required to answer the question?

To 7 (Time schedule): Roughly consider in which phases you can divide the development of your thesis. In most cases, the work starts with a literature review (systematic or heuristic). Then, depending on the task, there is a phase of data acquisition, empirical analysis or development. After that, you need to develop, describe and evaluate the result. The key points of the time schedule are often specified by you (e.g. target submission date, target start of work). If a practice partner is involved in the preparation of the work, you should definitely coordinate your time planning with the partner. Often, vacation times, for example, have to be taken into account. Do not schedule the writing too late in the process. Since you are usually not used to create extensive written work, you should start writing early enough.

To 8 (Outline): This part will be added in a later phase of the preparation of the exposé. The outline should be coordinated with the supervisor at each forthcoming meeting. The breakdown of the topic must be expressed in the chapters and subchapters. A default structure would include the following points on the first level: 1. Introduction, 2. Related research / theoretical and conceptual foundations, 3. Method and Approach, 4. Results, 5. Discussion, 6. Conclusion and Outlook. On the second level, the structure will depend on your topic and approach.

To 9 (Literature): Provide a few essential sources (3-10) and refer to them in the text. The sources should be as close as possible to your topic and methods you intend to use.