

Notes on writing an exposé

The first comprehensive written presentation of a research project takes place after the orientation and planning phase in the form of an exposé. It describes all essential aspects of the future project in a generally understandable way: research context, research topic, research question, methods, sources and, if applicable, preliminary work already done.

It is necessary or useful

- for the registration of research papers (master's and master's theses, dissertations)
- for scholarship and research applications
- as an indicator of feasibility and consistency of content
- as a basis for discussion
- as a starting point for the more detailed planning of a research project.

Both the preparation of the exposé, which often requires a clear structuring of the research idea for the first time, is useful for the researcher and the supervisor, as is the fixed result, which forms a thematic, methodological and planning anchor for the duration of the research period - regardless of how far one eventually moves away from it. There are no uniform guidelines for exposés. In the field of modern art history, exposés for Bachelor's theses should have a length of about one page of text, for Magister and Master's theses of about 3 pages (Times 12 point single-spaced), and for dissertations a length of about 10 pages is expected. The synopsis should have the following structure (for doctoral theses, different guidelines apply depending on the institution):

Abstract

Very abbreviated, overview-like presentation of the research need, research question, method, expected result and benefit.

Introduction and research question

Brief outline of the topic with a quick focus on the subject to be investigated. What is your research question? What do you want to prove, what do you want to disprove? To this end, aspects of art and cultural history or a research tradition can be outlined, an existing theoretical background can be illuminated, a general doctrinal opinion can be questioned, a classification in research disciplines can be made and, if applicable, a personal research interest can be stated. The introduction of the topic should be focused on a concrete question, and at the same time the relevance of the topic should be made clear.

State of research

Overview of existing work in the thematically closer research area. The author conveys his or her knowledge of the subject and points out research deficits and, if applicable, points of connection to existing work. This results in research relevance, further thematic delimitation and possible methodological approaches.

Method and sources

The method used to answer the question outlined above should be named and its suitability briefly justified. This can be a source research, a qualitative or quantitative analysis, a comparative study, etc. The method used should also be mentioned. Here, too, a reference to methodological literature and methodologically comparable studies is appropriate. If source work is in the foreground:

Description and assessment of the source situation with regard to type, extent, expected relevance and accessibility, possibly also in the form of a table or a sketch. At this point, reference should also be made to existing contacts and agreements (e.g. with archives).

Preliminary work

If preliminary work has already been done that goes beyond the planning of the study (e.g. extensive research), this should be listed with reference to specific points of contact.

Work plan and timetable

A preliminary structuring of the time available for the project in the form of a work plan documents a realistic assessment of the sequence, structure and scope of the expected research work. A monthly grid is recommended. Within these units, several small work steps can be listed. The more concrete the work plan and timetable are (e.g. by precisely naming archival materials and archives to be worked on), the more meaningful it is for an assessment of feasibility.

Literature

List of literature used in the exposé. It should already contain the publications that are central to the research, even if further sources and references are developed in the course of the work.

Helpful literature:

Prochno, Renate (2008): *The Study of Art History. A practice-oriented introduction.* Berlin 1999, 3rd revised edition Berlin: Akad.-Verl.

Kruse, Otto (2005). *No fear of the blank page: without writer's block through studies.* (Campus concret; 16). 11th ed. Frankfurt/Main, New York: Campus.

Karmasin, Matthias and Ribing, Rainer (2006). *The design of scientific papers.* (UTB 2774), Vienna: WUV Facultas.