

THESIS PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

(Updated February 2024)

It is recommended that you have a thesis committee and research project selected by the end of your first academic year (Spring). Once these have been selected, you must present a formal thesis proposal to your committee. The purpose is to **A)** ensure you have done thorough background research on the topic, **B)** have developed clear objectives/hypotheses and appropriate methods and analyses to address them, and **C)** have received input from all of your committee members. It is best to get this input early on, as committee members can often help with any issues you may be struggling with and offer good ideas/approaches that you may not have considered. Remember to try to schedule a committee meeting well in advance, as it can often be difficult to get everyone together at the same time. It is suggested that you complete your thesis proposal in your first spring or summer, but you can certainly do it earlier if you are so inclined. Below is an overview of what you should have prepared for the proposal meeting:

1. You should have a written proposal that provides background on the research topic, the objectives of your research, the methods, and analyses to be used, how you will interpret the results (or you may include actual results if you already have some), and a literature

cited section. In addition, you should have a brief abstract/project summary at the beginning that briefly summarizes the entire proposal (a paragraph to a page long). It is usually best to write this last. If you have already written a grant proposal for your work, this can serve as your proposal. If you have not, you can follow the format below. Some of the proposals can be used in your final thesis. There is no specified length for the proposal. Keep it clear and concise.

- a. Project summary/abstract (a paragraph to 1 page summarizing steps b-f)
 - b. Project background
 - c. Research Objectives
 - d. Materials and Methods
 - e. Analyses
 - f. Significance of research
 - g. Literature cited
2. You should give all your committee members the written proposal at least two weeks in advance to give them time to read it before the meeting. This will make the meeting much more efficient and effective.
 3. For the meeting, you should prepare an oral presentation that explains your proposal. Using PowerPoint is a good way to do this. The committee may appreciate a printout of the PowerPoint presentation for the meeting. You can schedule a room for your meeting 1) at NU with the PBC's Program Assistant at plantbiology@northwestern.edu or 2) at CBG with your advisor.

4. During and after your presentation, your committee members will ask you questions and offer advice on your project. You should allow at least 2 hours for the meeting. Feel free to bring food/snacks for everyone.
5. Upon meeting completion, your committee will tell you if there is anything else they expect you to do that you did not include in your proposal or if it seems good as presented.
6. Have the committee members sign the “Thesis proposal committee meeting form” found at <https://plantbiology.northwestern.edu/graduate/resources/pbc-thesis-proposal-form.pdf>
7. Upload your proposal form to your GSTS portal. Use [these guidelines](#) if you need help with the upload process.
8. Email the completed form to the PBC’s Program Assistant at plantbiology@northwestern.edu and inform them about your upload in GSTS.

Enjoy the rest of the day. You have completed the proposal meeting!