The dissertation prospectus is an explanation of the project, of the contribution to knowledge and understanding that you hope to make, and of your plans for making progress. It typically runs 5,000-6,000 words, plus a 30-60 item bibliography. While it is not a public document, it should be prepared to professional standards following guidelines given in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. After you complete the dissertation, you will prepare an abstract, which is normally a summary of the argument, chapter by chapter. Before writing the dissertation, you obviously are not in a position to summarize it. Rather, the prospectus describes why you are undertaking the topic and how you will go about it. Normally it states the problem(s) to be discussed and one or more working hypotheses or thesis statements. There should be enough preliminary detail to communicate a careful understanding of the work you have undertaken and to outline the project chapter by chapter. There is no prescribed structure to the prospectus. Some prospectuses approximate abstracts and consist chiefly of chapter plans; others approximate proposals and emphasize the contexts out of which the work grows. All prospectuses, however, will contain some mix of the following elements.

1. Title. The title is a crucial part of any academic work. A good title encourages readers to open it and publishers to consider it favorably. The ideal is a short, memorable title that forecasts the work to be done. If it signals the problem or tension to be explored, then readers will sense how the work will proceed and what it will contribute—and so will you. Conversely, a puzzling or boring title is less inviting to others and much less help to the author. Good titles indicate the domain to be studied and the approach. Often, one will be identified in the main title and the other in the subtitle.

2. Rationale. What is the general nature of your project and why is it of interest? What is your preparation for undertaking it?

3. Materials and plans. What are your primary texts? Why have you selected them? What kind of coverage do they provide? What explorations will you be undertaking? Are there any pertinent material problems either with the availability or the nature of the materials? Sometimes it's helpful to give yourself a realistic schedule in the prospectus or to mention particular resources or requirements, including contacts made or to be made with libraries and archives or with authors or critics, languages to be learned or improved, technology to be employed, etc.

4. State of the discussion. A literature survey of some sort is almost inevitable in a prospectus, even if it is less prominent in the finished dissertation. If a theoretical "approach" is important to your work, then you may survey the theoretical issues as well as the secondary literature on your materials, but don't bog down in extended summaries. Rather, emphasize the pertinence and value of the approach for the materials you intend to study and the questions you will investigate. Shape the presentation of secondary literature so that it both supports your work and leaves you space to advance.

5. Methods. What is your approach? The answer may be pragmatic, overlapping with the discussion of materials, or it may be more theoretical, growing out of the state of the discussion. Why is your approach suitable? If you will be drawing heavily on a defined
theoretical approach, what may be learned about it from your study?

6. Organization. Even at this early stage, and even though some or many things will inevitably change, it is vitally important to outline the projected stages of the argument. At a minimum, provide a list of chapters (with titles, if you can) with their contents, topics, and distinctive angles. Make it clear how the arguments differ from one another and how they fit together. Where you can, describe the consecutive parts or the hierarchical elements of the chapters. It can be helpful to enter into illustrative detail, potentially drawing on work you have done for a course; show your approach in action.

7. Result. Finally, articulate a preliminary sense of the contribution you hope to make. What do you think you will add to knowledge or understanding?

While the above list can serve as a template for some prospectuses, it need not be slavishly followed. The result can be combined with the rationale, for instance, or the state of the discussion can diffused throughout as part of a relatively extensive summary of the chapters. The only indispensable elements are the title, a longer or shorter view of the parts of the project, and a bibliography.

A word about style. Apart from the optional discussions of your preparation and plans, the prospectus, like the dissertation and the abstract to come, should focus on the product, not on the producer or the production. That means that self-reference to you or to the writing should be eliminated. "In this dissertation I will say" is boring; just say it, without saying that you are saying it. Even a prospectus should be a thing of beauty and a joy, if not forever, at least for the next few years.

The prospectus should be completed within 3 months of the qualifying exam and must be approved and submitted by the end of the quarter following the general exam (i.e., by the end of fall quarter following a spring exam). A good minimum pace would be: 2 weeks of breather following the exam, 2 weeks to prepare a short or broken sketch of the prospectus, a month to compile and begin to explore the pertinent bibliography, a week to prepare a more or less full-length draft of the prospectus, one to three weeks to complete the prospectus. The Supervisor and then the other committee members are expected to read the prospectus within two weeks of receipt; when all have approved, the Supervisor should so report to the Graduate office. It is the student's responsibility to submit the prospectus in time to allow for revisions and approval before the deadline.