



# THE THESIS PROPOSAL

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## Section I: Statement of the Overall Topic and Review of the Literature on the Topic

This section should begin with a brief introduction to the topic in general (for example, primary education in both the Dominican Republic and the United States; or Barbadian Literature, especially the works of one particular author; or Cuban cinema, particularly those films by a specific director), followed by a review of the most important critical literature on the topic to date. You should cite here specific examples of critics and/or scholars whose work up to the present on your subject has been noteworthy and widely considered "expert" in the field. As you cite these specialists, you should also name their major works on the topic, articles as well as books. In each case, you should make their point of view on the topic clear to the reader. What has their research unearthed on this topic, and what position/s on the topic has their research led them to espouse?

## Section II: Your Thesis and Its Place in the Overall Debate

In this section, you differentiate your own project from what has already been written. You do so by clearly stating what the argument of your project is. This section should follow logically from the one above, in that it generally considers the previous scholarship within your own thesis statement. For example, following from the above:

- "As noted in Section I, most scholars have considered primary literacy education in the Dominican Republic to be essentially the same as that in the United States. While this is essentially true in many respects, there is one important difference: The Dominican Republic, unlike the United States, has not embraced the 'whole language' approach to early literacy. Rather, primary educators in the Dominican Republic remain committed to phonetic and grammatical approaches to literacy acquisition. To date, scholars have ignored this important difference. My thesis will argue that this difference in approach to early literacy is significant, with long-range consequences."



- “As noted in Section I, little to date has been written about Barbadian literature in general and most of what has been written has concerned male authors. Though there is a small body of scholarship pertaining to the work of Paule Marshall, no one as yet has written an in-depth study of the relationship between gender and real property in her novel *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. My argument is that the men and the women in the novel have remarkably different relationships with real property. The male idea of ‘home’ is not at all the same as the female idea of ‘home.’ This difference is one of the central themes of this novel and deserves attention.”
- “As noted in Section I, in Cuba, films made by Cuban-Americans or Cubans in exile are not widely distributed or well known, in part because the films deal with the Revolution in a negative light, but also because Cubans on the island dispute the notion of a Cuban diaspora and believe that those who live in exile no longer represent Cuban reality in an authentic light. They take the position that directors who experience life outside Cuba represent Cuba through a distorted lens, and that the films they make are largely works of propaganda. In this thesis, I will dispute that position. I believe that there is an avid ‘underground’ distribution and viewership of films made by Cuban-Americans in Cuba, and that many in Cuba believe these films to be a more accurate representation of Cuban life than those made in Cuba.”
- Follow this statement of your thesis, or argument, with more explanation of your position on the question.

### Section III: Research Method

Your thesis, or argument, should raise a number of questions. Why have Dominican educators resisted the “whole language” approach to early literacy? Why have primary educators in the U.S. embraced it? What sorts of theorists might give us some insights about the relationship of sex and gender to ideas of “home” in immigrant communities? Can one who has lived outside of Cuba for thirty years represent Cuba in an authentic way? What qualifications must a filmmaker possess to produce an “authentic” film? What is “propaganda” and how does it relate to Cuban film made both inside and outside of Cuba’s borders?

After stating the main questions swirling around your research topic, you should move into a discussion about the ways in which you plan to gather evidence for your own argument. You should reflect on the broad analytical approach (education theory, gender theory, cinema theory) and on the school/s of thought that will inform your investigation of the problem (universal core theorists? Marxist theorists? “Queer ”



theorists?). Moreover, the methods section will comment on the kinds of information you will need to address your central questions. What sorts of things will you need to find out? Will you need archival materials? Are you doing ethnographic research? Will you need oral histories? On the more technical level, this section specifies the precise steps you will take to collect and interpret information (or “data”). What kinds of printed sources will be used (books, articles, government data)? Who will be interviewed, and what kinds of questions will they be asked? What social contexts will be observed and how will your data be organized?

Returning to Section I, perhaps some of the critics you named there have misinterpreted the problem because a different methodological approach shows the problem in a whole new light. For instance, perhaps the forces of gentrification in cities is not sociological, as has been previously written, but rather, economic. In that case, making your methodological approach perfectly clear in Section III may also strengthen the argument as stated in Section II. In other words, this section ties all together.

#### Section IV: Appendices

Include at the end of your proposal:

1. A table of contents: With section headings and the approximate number of pages of each section.
2. An annotated bibliography: A bibliography of your sources with a brief discussion of each and how it fits into your project.

#### NOTA BENE:

For best results, please do follow the above. While writing the proposal and following the thesis timeline, be sure to get feedback from your advisor at every step. It may seem desirable to work independently and present a completed work all at once, but this approach could cost you valuable time. Your advisor should have some expertise in your topic and can point you to essential sources you have omitted or to flaws in your argument. Better to know about these problems sooner, rather than later.

Also note that the careful construction of your proposal and annotated bibliography, in close consultation with your advisor, will take some time. But as anyone who has ever written a thesis or a dissertation knows, time spent on the proposal and bibliography is time saved when writing the actual thesis or dissertation. If all is plotted out carefully, the actual writing of the project becomes much easier and moves along much more quickly.