

HT/ISC Proposal and Abstract Guidelines*

The entire proposal should consist of 1) an abstract of about 500 words, and 2) a page of relevant bibliographical information of at least 10 primary and secondary works. The proposal should lay the essential groundwork for the research and writing that you will undertake during the semester. Do ensure that your proposal is kept concise and clear.

The **abstract** must be centered on a strong, focused, and persuasive research question. In other words, what is the main thesis statement of your HT/ISC, or what is the overarching question or problem that will guide its argumentative trajectory? This question must be an analytical and also answerable one in view of the primary and secondary materials you are proposing to work with. Why should a reader (whether a specialist in the field or a more general one) be interested in the research question that your HT/ISC poses? To this end, you should also be thinking about the stakes of this question, that is, to which specific academic fields of inquiry will your research be contributing and how? What are the implications of the argument you are making, especially at this time? Addressing this last point in particular justifies the existence of your HT/ISC as a work of current scholarship; it demonstrates your knowledge of recent and pressing conversations in the academic fields you are working across, and your ability to convey how your HT/ISC draws on and ultimately contributes to them.

In general, the HT/ISC abstract should include:

- A working title.
- Your name below the title.
- A brief introduction of the social and historical context for your research question (even if your HT/ISC might be organized under the rubrics of the “contemporary,” for example, it must be underpinned by political, cultural, and/or aesthetic developments of the time that are crucial for setting the scene of your research question; a well-conceived research question is never an ahistorical one), and a discussion of the main issues that your HT/ISC will address more generally.
- The research question or problem that your HT/ISC intends to solve, and just as crucially, why it matters. This must be a clear and cogent statement signposted early in the research proposal that illustrates the central purpose of the HT/ISC.
- A situating of your proposed research question within scholarly discussions that you are drawing from and intend the HT/ISC to contribute to. You must explain how your HT/ISC offers an innovative and original take on this existing literature. How exactly will the research question that you are pursuing contribute to the collective knowledge of these existing academic conversations? How is its line of inquiry different from scholarship that has already been published? You may wish to think about how your HT/ISC is extending, building upon, challenging, or even moving beyond discussions in the field(s).
- A description of how your primary source material will address the terms of your research question. Ideally, this should involve a reflection on 1) why the themes or ideas of this particular literary or visual text are crucial for your project, and 2) what its critical imperative as an aesthetic work is (that is, why is a literary or visual text even necessary to illuminate the stakes of your main argument?).

***These guidelines are adapted from Dr. Yanbing Er’s HT Research Proposal Guidelines. We thank her for allowing us to use hers as a model for the HT/ISC Abstract Guidelines.**