Writing a Thesis Proposal/Prospectus

Step 1: The preliminary meeting
You need to find someone to agree to chair your thesis committee. Make an appointment with a faculty member and bring along a rough outline of your topic, research question, and working thesis. He or she will want to know what you plan to do and your reasoning for doing so, before agreeing to become your thesis director. Your research agenda may not be fully formed, but you will need to come with enough background so that the faculty member can decide if he or she is a good fit for you, or not.

Step 2: Writing the proposal
There are numerous works on how to write a proposal/prospectus (entire shelves in libraries have been devoted to this topic.) Proposal lengths can vary. Please consult with your thesis director about his/her individual expectations for a proposal and for thesis.

Please address and label each of the following in your proposal:
1. Abstract of proposal
2. Table of contents of proposal
3. Introduction
   A. What is the context?
   B. What is your research question?
   C. What is your working thesis?
   D. What has led you to this conclusion?
4. Sources
   A. What exactly do you propose to study?
   B. What will be your primary source material?
5. Historiography: What have other books and articles said about your topic?
6. Scholarly importance: Why is this topic an important avenue of historical inquiry?
7. Outline with timeline for completion
8. Bibliography

Step 3: Seeking Approval
In addition to your thesis director, you will need to find two other faculty members to serve on your committee. Once your thesis director fully approves your proposal, you may send it on to the other two members of your committee for their approval. Make sure you collect signatures on the Application for Master of Arts Degree Candidacy and then submit this form to the Graduate Program Director.

Step 4: Beginning work on your thesis
Once your thesis director and the rest of your committee members approve your proposal, you will be able to begin work on your thesis in earnest. Your proposal becomes the groundwork for your thesis. Much of the information you’ll re-use in some form or other in the thesis itself, so you want to do your best work. Make sure you and your advisor have a very clear understanding about what you are proposing before you actually begin working on the formal proposal itself, this way you can avoid research dead-ends.

Step 5: Formatting your thesis: The final copy of your thesis must be formatted within these guidelines from ESU’s Graduate School: http://www.emporia.edu/dotAsset/547d5683-e1e4-4f1f-a141-a5ab2cbd2f44.pdf
See “Deadlines for Master’s Theses and Projects” on the department website for information on graduation forms, the thesis defense, and filing. Some deadlines occur in the semester BEFORE you graduate.