

Research Proposals



NOTE: Each discipline and granting agency has its own guidelines for writing research proposals, so be sure to consult your professor or advisor as well as any specific guidelines you have received. It is also helpful to locate sample proposals in your discipline or from the agency to which you are applying.

The purpose of the research proposal: The research proposal is your chance to explain the significance of your project to organizations who might wish to fund or otherwise support it. Ideally, it will demonstrate the quality and importance of your project as well as your ability to conduct the proposed research. The proposal also gives you the opportunity to think through your research project, to refine your focus, and to predict any challenges that may arise. It may be helpful to consult your proposal at various stages in your research process to remind yourself of your focus and to chart how your project has progressed.

Components of a Research Proposal

- **Title page:** Give your project a working title, which may or may not change.
- **Statement of Purpose:** Explain what you hope your research will find or show. State your research question or a series of research questions that you hope to answer.
- **Background:** Explain your interest in an experience with this topic. Describe any previous research you have conducted on this or related topics, any classes you have taken on this or related topics or any reading you have done in the field. If you have personal experience that has led to you want to do more research, describe that here.
- **Significance:** Explain why this topic is worth considering or why this question or series of questions is worth answering. What do you hope to learn from it? How or what will you contribute to the field of knowledge that exists on this topic? What new perspective will you bring? What use might your final paper be for others in the field or in the general public? With whom might you share your findings once the project is complete?
- **Methodology:** Describe the kind of research you will conduct this project (library research, internet research, interviews, observations, ethnographies, etc.). Explain how you will conduct your research in as much detail as possible. If you will consult other sources (such as a statistician, an ethnographer, or a librarian) explain what role they will serve and how you hope they will enhance your development of an appropriate methodology for this project. Discuss the kinds of sources you hope to consult and the methods you will use to extract and process the information you gather in as much detail as possible. Once the project is underway, you might find you need to revise your methodology or adopt new methods of gathering and processing data.
- **Problems:** Describe problems you expect to encounter and how you hope to solve them. For example, texts might be unavailable, necessitating travel to other libraries or use of inter-library loan facilities; the time frame may limit the amount of research or the quality or specificity of research you are able to do; people you had hoped to interview might be unavailable or unwilling to participate. Try to anticipate every major problem and make contingency plans so that the project doesn't become derailed.
- **Bibliography:** Make a list of texts you plan to consult. You may modify this list as you conduct your research.

Helpful Research Proposal Tips

- Contextualize your research question within literature in your field. Tie your research to major questions in your field.
- Limit the boundaries of your research question so that it is not too broad.
- Cite landmark studies in your field.
- Reference theoretical and empirical contributions of others researchers.
- Develop a coherent and persuasive argument for the proposed research.
- Follow specific proposal guidelines.
- Consult professors and other students in your field.
- Proofread!