



How to Write a Proposal

What is a Proposal?

A proposal outlines ideas for a particular project, whether it be a business proposition, research, an experiment, or any undertaking that requires permission or funding. Proposals in an academic context are often written as requests for grants to pursue research. As an undergrad, you will likely be writing proposals to request permission from your professors to pursue a particular project. Based on your proposal, the reader will decide whether your project is feasible, thought-out, and, if applicable, deserving of funds. As such, your plan's entire future may depend on a well-written and convincing proposal.

Writing a proposal lets you test the viability of your plans, gather preliminary research, and create a roadmap of your project so that you can be 100% sure you can accomplish the project.

Proposal Questions

What is your work about?

- What do you plan to do?
- Why do you need to do it? What impact will it have?
 - Consider who/what is the constituency that this project will help or impact. This information would be included directly in the proposal.
- Who/what is your audience that you are writing for? Are they an expert in the field? Are they a part of a grant funding body (or other group) that may not necessarily know too much about your topic?
 - This information would not be stated directly in the proposal, but you want to consider it as you write, and choose your wording and details accordingly.
- How do you plan to do it? What materials will you use, and are those things readily accessible? DO NOT simply list items—explain how you will use them.
 - In the sciences, this might include things like lab equipment or facilities.
 - In history or classics, this might include an overview of the availability of existing sources, both primary and secondary.
- Some proposals may also note when a project will be finished or a rough timeline of the project, and others will include sections on the resources necessary, including monetary cost.



Be Brief

- Most formal proposals are a page or two (not counting sources/bibliography)
 - Some, including topic proposals for a research paper, may only be a paragraph—though this depends on your instructor and the specifics of the project.

Be Argumentative

- A proposal's purpose is to convince the reader that a project is achievable and necessary for the betterment of advancement in research (i.e, for the advancement of science, technology, healthcare, etc.). Stress the feasibility of the project, and provide evidence that it can and should be accomplished.
- Flaws/limitations can and should be mentioned, noting how you will address them. This shows that you have thought critically about the project.
 - For example, if you are researching a subject about which there is very little written, how do you plan to remedy the lack of secondary sources?

You May Include a Preliminary Thesis/Hypothesis

- Although you probably haven't done enough research to commit to a particular argument, you can mention presumptions about what your research may show and its overall importance.
- Remember that what is set out in your proposal is not set in stone; over the course of your project, your methods, arguments, and sources may change significantly from what you first proposed.
 - Changes, however, are only feasible depending on what type of proposal you are writing. For instance, if your proposal is for a grant, there are oftentimes specific goals that are set by the party you are soliciting support from that cannot be changed easily. Have a Defined and Limited Scope
- Make sure that the project you are proposing has limits and does not appear open-ended—the more open-ended and vague a topic/project is, the more difficult it is to assess the likelihood of it being accomplished.

REMEMBER: Your proposal IS NOT a shorter version of your paper or project—it is an argument for being allowed TO DO your research.