

The Formal Research Proposal: Detailed Project Guidelines

The Research Proposal: Putting ideas to Paper -- Planning your Research Project

In Chapter 3, we explored multiple sides of an issue, experimented with strategies of argument, and discussed the importance of audience, persona, and rhetorical stance. By working through Chapter 4, you have begun the process of meeting of generating ideas for the research project, and some of you may already have a head start on this from the work you did your previous assignments. Now it's time to craft a research proposal that puts your ideas to paper in the form of a plan!

Purpose/Goals: The research proposal is designed to orient you to your research focus by asking you to articulate a topic for investigation; it also introduces you to the genre of proposal writing and establishes the relationship between sophisticated use of sources and strong research writing.

Subject: You are free to choose your own topic for this research project, and it should be one that interests you or appeals to you in some way. Ideally, it will be a topic you've explored in the Rhetorical Analysis paper or Multiple Sides project. The proposal is a promise of sorts, for you'll develop this topic into your major research-based argument. Realize, however, as you work on this topic, that the specifics of your research may cause you to modify your topic. This is perfectly acceptable and, in fact, normal! Research and writing are processes of discovery.

But what is a Research Proposal?? Research proposals are commonly used in a wide variety of disciplines and professions as a means of developing agendas for research communities, securing funding for a study, publicizing plans for inquiry and field research, and testing the interest of potential audience in a given project. Therefore, the genre, organization, and contents of the Research Proposal differ in important ways from other kinds of popular and academic writing. In the proposal itself, you need to explain your interest in your chosen subject and establish a set of questions to guide your inquiry. You also need to delineate the timeline for your research and writing process. Although this part may seem obvious, it is a crucial "time management" and "reality check" in helping to shape the scope and range of your research.

Suggestions for getting started:

- You might complete the **Research Sketch Form** (available on the *Envision* Website) first before turning to the full proposal.
- Use the **Prewriting Checklists** at the end of each chapter to get your ideas flowing about the text you plan to research.
- Discuss your developing ideas for the proposal with your teacher or your writing peers.

Format/Length: For the actual research proposal, please compose a 3-5 page document to "propose" your research paper idea. The proposal should be double spaced, 12 point font, spell-checked, and proofread. Be sure that your proposal is more polished than a stream-of-consciousness free-write. Each proposal should also use **an appropriate image or visual rhetoric text**. Finally, compose a **short "bio"** constructing your research persona and developing your ethos for this project (see chapter 3 for more on "bio" and persona).

As you can tell, this assignment asks you to try out "real-world" standards for the length, format, and contents of this Research Proposal – we are making it real so you will have mastered this genre to use in many future academic and professional contexts!

Content and Process: After completing your brainstorming using the Research Sketch and **Suggestions for getting started** (above), complete the questions below to help you structure this genre of writing. Create a plan for your research (using, if you wish, subheadings as well as the required visuals) and include the following components (you can work through the attached page as a checklist): **Keep any prewriting you do for this proposal in a folder along with the final draft of your proposal.**

- Come up with an **intriguing title** for your research proposal. [This title will be different from the one for the research paper, and the spirit of inquiry should appear in your choice of a title.]
- Craft an **effective introduction** to engage the audience's interest. [Note: we will be sharing these proposals with the class – so your audience is the entire class.]
- Identify and underline your **tentative thesis** at this point. [Note: This will GREATLY help your time management and navigation of resources; see Douglas Hunt's words of wisdom:

Develop hypotheses early [...] Objectivity seems to demand that you form no thesis before your research is complete. But if you have no thesis, you have no way of formulating questions for interviews or evaluating the importance of what you read. A better approach is to form a thesis -- perhaps it would be better to call it a hypothesis -- as early as possible, and then be prepared to change it as often as an honest interpretation of the data demands. (419)

- Give some **background** on the topic (or, what you know so far). [Note: acknowledging how little you know can be an effective rhetorical move, for it shows you what you need to research!]
- Identify **a series of questions** that will inform your research. [Explain them in the proposal.]
- Delineate **the methods** you will use to conduct your research: Library investigation of primary and secondary sources? Interviews with experts on campus or in the community? Field research with student or community populations? [Note: Be as specific as possible, providing the names of key sources and potential interviewees as well as the rationale for why these methods will serve your needs. Also be creative, and think “outside the box” on how you can make this fun!]
- Set up **a timeline** for your research. [Note: You can use the syllabus to help you to this; be sure to identify the steps of your process. This aspect is the one common denominator in all research proposals, no matter what the disciplinary or professional field.]
- Determine and articulate **the purpose or goal** of this research: Why are you researching this particular topic? Why do you feel compelled to study this topic further? Whom do you hope to persuade? What is the significance of this work? [Note: This last aspect is the most crucial one, and it often makes or breaks the decision of a governing board, financial establishment, or other evaluative audience when judging various proposals for their merit, feasibility, and contribution to the field. You might decide to use this aspect for your conclusion.]
- Create a **bio** for your research argument. [Note: You can model rely on multiple sides work and reference previous papers you have written; compose the persona for your research paper!]

Remember to include visual rhetoric in your proposal!