

## **Proposals**

### **Purpose of Proposals**

The purpose of a proposal is to persuade the reader of the value of your work. You want to prove that there is an urgent problem or gap in knowledge that your work will provide a solution to or a way to fill the gap (also see: Novelty Moves). Generally, the writers of proposals include a call to action such as to provide funding or other resources that they need in order to conduct research, provide services, or begin a project.<sup>1</sup>

### **Types of Proposals**

- Dissertations
- Fellowships
- Research
- Essays/Projects
- Grants

### **Audience**

The audience of a proposal is usually an advisor, committee, instructor, foundation, corporation, business, or newspaper depending on the type of proposal.<sup>2</sup>

The audience is looking to see that your work is feasible, fills a gap in current scholarship, or otherwise provides value to the field you're in. In a research proposal, a professor may also be looking for compatibility between your work as a potential advisee and their expertise as a potential advisor. In business/grant proposals, the organization providing funding is often looking to see that your work will fulfill their mission and be financially beneficial to them. It is important to tailor your proposal to align with the goals and priorities of your audience.<sup>3</sup>

### **Questions to ask yourself while writing a proposal**

1. What am I pursuing with this proposal?
  - a. What is my core research question/proposed solution?
  - b. What is the motivation or problem behind my proposal?
2. Who is my audience?
  - a. What is their goal or need?
  - b. Is my work a good match with that goal?<sup>4</sup>

Your research questions are the highlight of the proposal as they summarize the main motivation behind your work. In order to communicate your project's value, you need to hook the reader and make them interested in the questions you're looking to answer.

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<sup>1</sup> *Dissertation proposal*. Stanford Graduate School of Education. (2015, September 3). Retrieved March 22, 2022, from <https://ed.stanford.edu/academics/doctoral-handbook/milestones/dissertation-proposal>

<sup>2</sup> *Proposals*. Writing Commons. (2021, July 12). Retrieved March 22, 2022, from <https://writingcommons.org/section/genre/proposals/>.

<sup>3</sup> College, T. G. (2017, May 15). *The art of proposal writing: Proposal as genre*. Grad LIFE. Retrieved March 22, 2022, from <https://blogs.illinois.edu/view/6397/501277>

<sup>4</sup> College, T. G. (2017, June 22). *The art of proposal writing: Proposal as roadmap*. Grad LIFE. Retrieved March 22, 2022, from <https://blogs.illinois.edu/view/6397/522538>

Additionally, it's necessary to show that you have a clear understanding of the topic area and an actionable plan to move forward with your project. That plan should center around attempting to answer your question, so the question needs to be well-developed.<sup>5</sup>

### **Quality Research Questions are...**

1. Clear and explicit
2. Relevant (both to current scholarship in the field and to your background/interests)
3. Realistic (able to be researched, have a clear scope)

### **Structure of a Proposal**

Not all proposals will have the same structure. It's important to research the project, organization, and purpose of the project in order to structure your proposal in the most effective way possible. However, many proposals have similar expectations for what kind of information to include.

#### *Introduction:*

This might include a cover page, project summary or abstract, or sometimes a table of contents. This section should indicate the purpose of the proposal, provide a brief overview of your project, and introduce your research question. This also should include a justification of the need for the project.

#### *Background and Statement of Need:*

You should be sure to provide a detailed description of the need for the project/the gap it is filling in the background section. This section should provide your perspective of the current status quo and how your proposal will attempt to address this.<sup>6</sup>

If the proposal is for a dissertation, this background section should be in the form of a literature review on the current scholarship of your topic of interest, providing proof of preliminary research.<sup>7 8</sup>

#### *Research Question and Plan (Project Description, Methodology, Expected Outcomes, Schedule):*

In this section, you want to express the feasibility of your project and detail the outcome you plan to achieve. In a dissertation proposal, this section should include an explanation of the theoretical framework of the project and the

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<sup>5</sup> College, T. G. (2017, May 15). *The art of proposal writing: Proposal as genre*. Grad LIFE. Retrieved March 22, 2022, from <https://blogs.illinois.edu/view/6397/501277>

<sup>6</sup> *Foundation relations*. UMass Amherst. (n.d.). Retrieved March 22, 2022, from <https://www.umass.edu/cfr/grant-writing/basic-components-proposal>

<sup>7</sup> *Dissertation proposal*.

<sup>8</sup> "UT Dallas." *Writing Doctoral Dissertations Proposals | School of Arts and Humanities*, <https://ah.utdallas.edu/student-resources/graduate-students/doctoral-dissertation-proposals/>.

methodology that will be used to study the topic. This description should detail the contribution you will be making to the field.<sup>9</sup>

This section may also include a discussion of the schedule or general outline of the project. You want to make sure your audience comes away with a clear understanding of the scope of your project as well as the impression that *you* have a realistic plan for completing it.<sup>10</sup>

*Resources Required:*

If there are costs associated with the project you're proposing, this section should be included. This is not necessarily applicable to dissertations.

*Conclusion:*

The conclusion should bring the reader back to the main purpose of the project and leave them with a sense of its potential.

*References:*

Academic proposals should include proper citations.

Some organizations may explicitly require certain sections. For example, the National Science Foundation requires the following sections in grant proposals submitted to them:

- Cover Sheet
- Project Summary
- Table of Contents
- Project Description
- References Cited
- Biographical Sketch(es)
- Budget and Budget Justification
- Current and Pending Support
- Facilities, Equipment and Other Resources
- Special Information and Supplementary Documentation
  - Data Management Plan
  - Postdoctoral Mentoring Plan (if applicable)<sup>11</sup>

**Other tips**

- Use [Novelty Moves](#) to describe the gap in research/problem you're identifying and solving with your proposed projects.
- The tone of a proposal should be professional and persuasive, tailored to the type of work you're looking to do.
- Make sure that your main idea stands out by using the [BLUF strategy](#) to give readers your Bottom Line Up Front.

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<sup>9</sup> *Dissertation proposal.*

<sup>10</sup> Gross, A., Hamlin, A., Merck, B., Rubio, C., Naas, J., Savage, M., & DeSilva, M. (n.d.). *3.4 common sections in proposals.* Technical Writing. Retrieved March 22, 2022, from <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/technicalwriting/chapter/3-4-common-sections-in-proposals/>.

<sup>11</sup> "National Science Foundation - Where Discoveries Begin." *PAPP Guide - Introduction*, <https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappguide/nsf15001/>.