Proposals

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

A proposal outlines your plan for a research project. Proposals vary significantly by field. This handout focuses on proposals for academic papers and research projects; grant and funding proposals, policy proposals, and building proposals all follow different formats.

Regardless of format, most proposals will include the following elements:

- A title that reflects the course of argument you are likely to take
- A research question and a description of its context and importance
- A brief overview of existing research on the topic
- A bibliography, sometimes annotated, to demonstrate your familiarity with central and current existing research on your topic
- Many proposals will also include a tentative thesis or hypothesis.

Proposal formats

Arrange the information you want to present in a logical way. Be as specific as you can: even though you have not completed the project, you will build credibility by making connections to existing projects and by showing why your tentative argument and plan are reasonable.

You can base your proposal on one of the following models or organize it in a way that best reflects your material.

Three-paragraph proposal

**Purpose**: introduce and state your research question, summarize the issue, and explain why the topic is important and what is at stake in your question

**Method**: describe the methods and tools you will use to complete your project and why they are appropriate. For a research paper, this may be where you discuss the existing research. For other types of projects, methods may include academic research, outside interviews, field work, or archival research. If appropriate, you may discuss if your methods will be quantitative or qualitative.

**Implications**: explain why your project is significant for the field and how it will contribute to the academic conversation.

End with a bibliography.

APA-style proposal

Used mainly in psychology, the social sciences, and some sciences for upper-level and professional research projects, this style is extremely specific. It has three sections: an **Introduction**, a **Literature Review**, and a **Methodology**. Much more information about this kind of proposal can be found in the APA manual.