



THE PROPOSAL

A proposal is a formal way of presenting a research project for the instructor's approval. It explains what the student intends to focus on in the essay paper, what sources he or she plans to consult, what approach will be taken, and so on.

A proposal is obviously not a final stage in the writing of the paper, and you may change your mind about many things after writing it. But you must still be as informed and as specific as possible while writing it. The more specific you are at this stage, the more it will help clarify and organize the final content of your paper.

You must be some way into your research when you write your proposal. Your research need not be complete, but you must have a feel for the topic, know what aspect of it you are going to focus on, know some of the sources you are going to consult, and have at least skimmed through some of these resources.

A proposal must include most of the following:

Your topic or subject, and an explanation of your interest in it: Why have you chosen this topic rather than any other? Or, why have you chosen to focus on this particular aspect of it? How is this choice going to benefit you?

The question: What is your question and why is this question important? What is your focus in regards to this question? This could be a preliminary thesis statement.

Your approach to the question: How do you plan to organize your paper? Is it, for example, going to put together evidence for a certain proposition? Is it going to compare and contrast two phenomena? Is it going to persuade the reader to accept an argument? If your paper is going to be organized in sections, indicate what they might be.

Research methods: Specify your sources for the paper, and offer some initial evaluations of these sources. How will these resources help develop your argument?

An explanation of the conclusions you expect to come to: This answers the question: so what have I learned from this analysis?

The Working Bibliography: As you write your proposal, you may need to consult more or different sources than those you have listed in your Annotated Bibliography.

Format of a proposal:

Read your assignment sheet carefully before you begin, and take your cues from it. Some instructors will accept a proposal in point format, but many professors want the proposal to be in essay format. That means that you must have clear paragraphs, topic sentences, formal prose, grammatical accuracy, correct spelling and punctuation, and full documentation, with a working bibliography.