

WRITING GRANTS, ABSTRACTS, AND RESEARCH PROPOSALS: AN INTRODUCTION

The handout is intended as a basic guide to the elements of research and grant proposals. It includes a list of hyperlinks by discipline to further assist you in more specific writing guidelines. Before you start writing any grant application, you should carefully read the specific instructions provided.

WRITING AN ABSTRACT

An abstract is a brief descriptive or informative summation of a larger project. Abstracts have many potential uses, including serving as quick guides to articles from periodicals and reports, as well as introducing your work to panels for conference acceptance or conference program summations. An abstract is meant to give the reader a quick look at the information presented in more detail in the project/work that follows.

For conference papers, research papers, theses and dissertations, you will almost always be asked to write an abstract. The main point to remember is that it must be succinct summation of your research. In fact, not only are abstracts short, they must almost always be a certain, specified length.

The purpose of an abstract is to convey your research or proposal in the simplest, most informative way possible. You should summarize the nature of the project/conference for which you are requesting funding, state how your writing or research presentation engages with and contributes to the field, include methodology or research goals, give a timetable or date range for the project, and specifically outline what the requested funding will cover.

Things to remember:

- Follow the word/page limit set by the application; do NOT exceed it
- Include essential facts, statistics, and project key words/phrases
- Omit or condense lengthy examples and details
- Revise the draft into polished, free-standing prose; the abstract should be a mini-essay in itself

RESEARCH/PROJECT PROPOSALS

Research proposals are intended to convince the audience that one's project is worthwhile, and that the author has the competence and organization to complete it. Generally, a research proposal should contain all the key elements involved in the research process and include sufficient information for the readers to evaluate the proposed study. Research and project proposals vary in length; they can be from 5 to 40 pages, depending on what the department, committee chair, or funding source requires.

Regardless of the research area and chosen methodology, all research proposals must address the following questions:

- What do you plan to accomplish?
- Why is this research or project valuable to the field?
- How are you going to execute the study?

A research proposal often shares similarities to a project proposal; however, a research proposal addresses a particular project: academic or scientific research. The forms and procedures for such research are usually clearly defined by the field of study, so guidelines for research proposals are generally more exacting than less formal project proposals.

Research proposals contain extensive literature reviews and should provide convincing support of the necessity of the research study being proposed. Doctoral dissertations begin with research proposal (also called a prospectus); the proposal must be accepted by the candidate's committee before the actual research begins. In addition to providing a compelling rationale for the proposed research, the proposal must detail the methodology for conducting said research; this methodology must be consistent with requirements of the professional or academic field.

Elements of a Proposal:

- Introduction
- Statement of the Problem
- Purpose of the Study
- Review of the Literature
- Questions and/or Hypotheses
- Methodology
- Significance of the Study
- References
- Appendices

Following is a list of general criteria for evaluating research and grant proposals:

- Does the proposal address a well-formulated problem?
- Is the research important (e.g., will the data collected have useful effects)?
- Is special funding necessary to solve the problem or collect the research?
- Is the research grounded in existing substance, and is this groundwork sufficiently sketched out?
- Does the proposal clearly explain what work or research will be pursued?
- Does the applicant have experience (i.e., a good track record) with proposed research and/or publication?

PROPOSING A BUDGET

A Budget Proposal is an outline of projected expenditures, i.e., your total costs for the research proposal or conference presentation/attendance (not just the money you are requesting). "Direct Costs" are funds that go directly into the project; for example, airfare and/or lodging expenses during conference attendance or research, equipment purchases and lab time qualify as direct costs. Additional expenses like food, registration fees, and transportation to/from hotel and airport are often classified as "Indirect Costs."

Things to remember:

- Be specific with quotes and attach copies; i.e., get actual flight or hotel rate quotes for the dates of travel, an invoice of all costs associated with event, etc.
- If the foundation to which you are applying provides per diem rates, you should use these amounts in your Budget Proposal for food and mileage allowances (please note: per diem rates for domestic and international travel differ)
- Give the location (city/state) of the conference or research destination (if applicable) as well as the specific dates you will be traveling, presenting, or collecting data and conducting research
- Provide brief explanations of the relevance and necessity of items when requesting funds to purchase research/testing equipment or location space

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND LINKS BY DISCIPLINE

Humanities

Online Writing Lab (OWL) Purdue University

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>

“Writing in the Humanities.” Dartmouth University

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/humanities/religion.shtml>

Brown University Writing Center

http://www.brown.edu/Student_Services/Writing_Center/resources/writers/ac-humanities.html

Sciences

CHEMINFO, “Guide for Better Science Writing.” Indiana University

<http://www.indiana.edu/~cheminfo/14-05.html>

“Writing Guidelines for Engineering and Science Students.” Virginia Tech.

<http://www.writing.eng.vt.edu/>

“A Guide for Proposal Writing.” National Science Foundation

<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2004/nsf04016/start.htm>

Brown University Writing Center

http://www.brown.edu/Student_Services/Writing_Center/resources/writers/ac-sciences.html

Social Sciences

“Writing in the Social Sciences.” Dartmouth University

http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/soc_sciences/write.shtml

“Paisley Currah's Writing Guide.” CUNY

<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/polisci/pcurrah/writing.htm>

“General Advice on Social Science Writing.” Boston University

<http://www.bu.edu/polisci/people/faculty/gerring/essaywritingadvice/Adviceonessaywriting.pdf>

Brown University Writing Center

http://www.brown.edu/Student_Services/Writing_Center/resources/writers/ac-socsci.html

Works Consulted

Pajares, Frank. “The Elements of a Proposal.” 17 May 2007. Available online at <<http://www.des.emory.edu/mfp/proposal/html>>.

Peyton Jones, Samantha, Bundy, Alan. “Writing a Good Grant Proposal.” 16 May 2007. Available online at <<http://research.microsoft.com/~simonpj/papers/Proposal.html>>.

Wong, Paul T. P. “How to Write a Research Proposal.” From International Network on Personal Meaning. 16 May 2007. Available online at <http://meaning.ca/archives/archive/art_how_to_write_P_Wong.htm>.

These guidelines were put together for use by the GPSA of UNLV by Heather Lusty, GPSA Vice-President 2007-2008.