

Writing a proposal

What is a proposal?

A proposal is an explanation and plan of intended or potential study. It is a concise brief that outlines the context and sets out the planning of the study or project.

A proposal generally outlines:

- **what** the study or project is about
- **why** this particular study or project needs to be undertaken
- **how** the study or project fits with previous research in that discipline or topic area
- **how** the study or project will be/could be done
- **how** the information from your study or project will be/could be used
- **what** (if any) budget is required
- **when** the various tasks/stages will be completed (if applicable).

While proposals are generally written to provide the foundation for an intended study, often writing a proposal is given as an assessment task at university in order to teach students about the various components of a research proposal and to provide the opportunity to develop the skills of writing proposals that may be of use in future work environments.

General features of a proposal

A proposal is generally assessed to determine whether there is a clear outline of what you plan to accomplish, including that:

- the project, problem or research question/hypothesis is clearly stated
- the aims and objectives are achievable
- there is a clear explanation of why this project, problem or research question has been chosen, or is necessary
- the methods of collecting and analysing the data are appropriate and adequate
- the potential outcomes are given
- any limitations and/or risk factors have been identified and assessed
- the study or project is worthy of being funded and has been realistically costed and budgeted
- the timeline is realistic and adequate

Presentation of proposals

Proposals are generally presented in report style, using headings and sub-headings. As always, refer to your assessment task details and the marking rubric/criteria for specific information on how to present your proposal. In the absence of guidelines choose headings to represent the purpose, context and content of your proposal.

Remember that regardless of the headings you choose or are directed to use, you should outline/explain the what, how, why and when (if applicable) of your study. This should ensure that you demonstrate that you have a clear picture of what you intend to accomplish in your actual study, or that you demonstrate what could be achieved if the study or project was actually undertaken.

One possible structure for a short undergrad proposal

Title

This is a clear succinct statement of the intended or potential study or project.

1. Introduction

This section should set the context and outline the scope of the study. It should:

- identify the project and the specific problem or area you wish to study
- state your purpose or your aims and objectives
- explain and/or justify why you have chosen this particular problem/study.

2. Review of the Literature

This section should show your awareness of what has been written in your study/project area and how your project or study fits with the studies/research already done (e.g. complements, replicates, fills a gap or extends the knowledge about the topic or issue). Thus, this section should also help you to justify why you have chosen your particular topic or project.

Questions to help with the literature review include:

- What do others have to say about this problem/area of research? i.e. What has already been found out? Is there a consensus or are there differences of opinion?
- What methods were used to come to these conclusions?
- What are the limitations of what has been done (including the methods used)?
- How does your intended project/study relate to this research?

3. Method/Methodology (if relevant)

This section should outline how you are going to (or could):

- undertake the study/project (e.g. by interviews, observation, field study)
- analyse the data you have gathered (or use the material you have gathered).

4. Potential Outcomes

This section should explain how the results (or information/materials) are going to be used (e.g. to produce a resource kit, to fulfil a community need, to provide a report for your workplace, or to contribute to the knowledge in the area). This section is **very** important if you are hoping to obtain funding for your study!

5. Limitations and/or risk analysis (if appropriate)

This section should explain any limitations to or risks associated with your study. For example, are you having to limit the scope/extent of your study because of time constraints? Do you anticipate any problems/constraints (e.g. in gaining access to people, resources)?

6. Budget (if appropriate)

7. Timeline

Reference List

Refer to the referencing guides in the SCU Library site recommended by your Unit Assessor or school for details of how to reference correctly.