



Assignment Sheet: Research Proposal

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1. BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

The last paper you submitted was brainstorming. Now it's time to let the dust settle and show that you've focused in on some realistic plans for conducting your study. After the readings and discussions in class, plus your initial explorations, you should have a good sense of where your project might take you. This document is your chance to share that sense with your workgroup.

The major objective of this assignment, then, is to show that you have identified a clear research question or problem and have settled on a plan of action for exploring it. You should strike a more confident tone here, as though you are convincing your instructor to permit your study to continue. In fact, that is the essence of a proposal. **Make your study important in the eyes of your audience—your workgroup and instructor.**

Write a proposal (probably around 1,000 words) that describes your question or problem, explains what you hope to learn by investigating it, and describes the people or groups who appear to be interested in it. Show that you have thought out your problem, seen potential significance of it, and seen potential application to other people. Also, locate a sample of sources you could explore to find the existing discussion about your issue. Your list should be in the form of an APA- or MLA-formatted list of preliminary sources you plan to explore—practice your citation format.

2. PROCEDURE

This document needs to show more polish than the previous one, but more importantly, it needs to show evidence of more deliberate thinking. Your job is to show that you have done these things:

- (1) Consider the question or problem you had identified in your Brainstorming Audit. Refine or clarify it, based on the continued thinking you've done¹. Explain what makes this question or problem worth further investigation. (Anticipate the "So what?" question.) Briefly consider why this question or problem has not been resolved.
- (2) Consider what you hope to learn by investigating this question or problem. What value do you hope to provide to others who may be interested?

¹Use the process illustrated by the Developing a Research Question presentation from the Laurier Library at U of Waterloo.

- (3) Conduct some very initial exploration of your problem or question. Determine who else is talking about this problem or issue and who else cares about this issue besides just you. How do you know they are interested? What evidence have you seen?
- (4) Conduct an initial search for sources that you might use in your investigation. Consider both scholarly and popular, with the balanced determined by the nature of your question/problem. You don't have to read these now, but provide a list of what you plan to read.

3. EVALUATION

Your Brainstorming Audit was a rough outline of your initial thinking on the project. This assignment adds formality and a clearer sense of process and intended outcome. Your thinking for this project is getting more serious; be sure that's reflected in the presentation of your paper. Show that you are thoroughly processing the material from class and the investigations you're doing. Specific evaluation guidelines are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Evaluation of Research Proposal

	QUESTION/PROBLEM JUSTIFICATION	INQUIRY PROGRESS	OUTCOME CONSIDERATION	POTENTIAL SOURCES
Excellent	Provides relevance to the field being studied and shows clear relation to a concerned audience	Documents the discovery process that led to current thinking	Clearly explains expected outcomes and consequences of research	Identifies a variety of relevant sources that will potentially help investigations
Adequate	Provides a reason for the research; lacks relation to outside parties	Includes steps taken but lacks sense of discovery as process	Identifies expected outcomes; does not extend into foreseen consequences	Lists sources that are marginally relevant or limited in scope
Poor	Research topic is presented as naturally important or without the need to support	Research process consists of in-class activities or little initiative	Outcomes of the study are absent, unclear, or impractical	Sources are absent, irrelevant, or inappropriate to the question/problem