

Project Proposal Examples

Good vs. Weak Proposals

IB 514: Graduate Scientific Writing
Mark Novak

3-slide limit:

Project Overview, Structure & Scope, Journal Strategy.

Slide 1: Project Overview — Strong Example

Working Title

Context-dependent predator switching stabilizes coastal food webs

Project Description

We test whether prey switching by generalist predators stabilizes rocky intertidal food webs across environmental gradients using long-term observational data and dynamic models.

Manuscript Type

Research article

Intended Audience

Community ecologists and food web modelers

Why this works: Clear contribution, specific scope, identifiable audience.

Slide 1: Project Overview — Weak Example

Working Title

Food webs and predator behavior

Project Description

This paper looks at predator-prey interactions and how they affect ecosystems. I will explore some data and models.

Manuscript Type

Paper

Intended Audience

Ecologists

Why this is weak: Vague question, undefined contribution, generic audience.

Slide 2: Structure & Scope — Strong Example

Proposed Structure

- ▶ Introduction: prey switching theory and predictions
- ▶ Methods: long-term intertidal surveys + dynamical model
- ▶ Results: switching strength across gradients
- ▶ Discussion: implications for food web stability
- ▶ Supplementary: mathematical details

Data and Analyses

- ▶ 12-year species abundance dataset
- ▶ Existing model & code adapted from prior work

Explicit Boundaries

- ▶ No experimental manipulation
- ▶ No evolutionary dynamics

Why this works: Concrete structure, feasible analyses, clear limits.

Slide 2: Structure & Scope — Weak Example

Proposed Structure

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Results
- ▶ Discussion

Data and Analyses

- ▶ Various datasets
- ▶ Some models

Scope

- ▶ Depends on how things go

Why this is weak: Non-informative structure, undefined data, no feasibility signal.

Slide 3: Journal Strategy — Strong Example

Candidate Journals

1. *Ecology Letters* — empiricists & theoreticians, general ecology
2. *Journal of Animal Ecology* — strong fit for predator behavior and dynamics
3. *Marine Ecology* — solid fit for marine audience

Format Constraints

- ▶ ~6,000 words main text
- ▶ 4–5 figures, allows supplemental online materials

Timeline

- ▶ Complete analyses: Week 5
- ▶ Full draft: Week 7
- ▶ Submission-ready draft: Week 10

Why this works: Strategic journal choice, realistic timeline, awareness of constraints.

Slide 3: Journal Strategy — Weak Example

Candidate Journals

- ▶ *Science*
- ▶ *Nature*
- ▶ *PeerJ*

Format Constraints

- ▶ Not sure yet

Timeline

- ▶ Write paper
- ▶ Submit

Why this is weak: Prestige-driven targeting, no evidence of planning or realism.

Reflection

- ▶ What information is essential vs. optional?
- ▶ Where does the strong example signal feasibility?
- ▶ How do journal choices reflect audience rather than ambition?

I encourage you to revise their slides immediately after peer feedback.