

Elements of a Research Proposal

1) Title:

The title of your proposal should describe the main goal of your proposal and give enough information so that the reader knows what you will seek funding for.

2) Summary page / Abstract:

The abstract is key. It should summarize your entire proposal. It lays out the questions / problems that you intend to answer, their significance and novelty in your discipline, your specific hypotheses, how you will go about testing them, and the broader impacts of the anticipated results. The abstract or summary page is short, usually around 300 words and no more than a page in length.

3) Introduction:

The introduction will describe the significance of your proposal followed by your objectives / aims for applying for funding. Your aims will have a logical link to the specific hypotheses that you intend to test. The emphasis should be placed on the intellectual merit of your proposed research and the gaps in knowledge that it will intend to answer. In other words, the introduction will discuss what has been done and what remains to be done. The introduction will contain a targeted literature review and your own preliminary results if you have them. It is a good idea to have your aims and objectives stand out in the introduction, either through the use of sub-headings, italics, bold or underline.

4) Hypotheses:

Hypotheses are more specific than aims and will detail a clear and testable prediction. You should not have too many hypotheses, but almost always more than one. This is discipline specific, but usually between two and five hypotheses is considered normal and expected. The number of hypotheses also depends on the proposed length of time you have to complete your research.

5) Experimental Design / Methodology:

The methodology will describe in detail your experimental design for testing your hypotheses. It will be well thought out and demonstrate that you have an achievable research plan. You will likely need to address a specific methodology for each of your hypotheses.

6) Timeline:

The timeline is fairly straightforward and should reflect that you have a reasonable and doable research project within the time constraints that are set forth. You should aim to be as specific as possible.

Additional elements - Anticipated Results; Budget; References; Appendices:

- It is not necessary to include anticipated results, but you should if you can. It shows that you have thought through your proposed research from start to finish. You can also comment on areas for future work in this section.
- All proposals will have a detailed budget justification that is clear and reasonable. For a class assignment, this is usually not necessary.
- All proposals will have references cited at the end. Make sure to use proper citation methods and only cite relevant literature in your proposal.
- Some proposals will have appendices. The appendices usually comprise of data from your own preliminary results or have relevant data from a published source.

Tips:

- Use future tense, especially in the methodology section.
- Watch out for passive voice! EX: "There has been research that ...x" v. "Research studies show...x"