

Writing Proposals¹

You may be tasked with providing a paper proposal or prospectus in a course and you will be required to submit one in this course. The proposal should be a key part of any research process. It should help the researcher organize his or her research project, construct a research design that is manageable within the constraints of time and resources facing the researcher, and focus the research effort. Time spent in developing a good proposal will pay off with high dividends throughout the remainder of the research process.

The proposal required in this course includes five parts: a title, a statement of the research problem, an explanation of the proposed research methodology, a preliminary outline, and an annotated bibliography.

The Title: A title should be indicative of what the research project is about. Don't attempt to make titles "cute." If you have to be cute, be cute in the subtitle. For example, one article has the following title:

Civil Service Reform: Carter's Little Liver Pill
for Government Indigestion

This is not a good title for a professional piece, and the author of the article should be ashamed of himself. (I'm not, however.)

The title should use "keywords"—words that clearly identify what the article is about. The above title accomplishes this.

Research Problem: Following the title, the proposal should state what the research is focused upon. Be precise in stating your research problem. The research problem should include your explanatory propositions, or hypotheses, a statement of the significance of the research problem (if it has no significance, why research it?), and your expected findings.

Research Methodology: The next step is to indicate which research methods will be employed in your research. If you will be conducting a survey, state that you will. If your research design will rely heavily on secondary sources, state that fact. Library research is a perfectly acceptable methodology. You should also indicate which statistical methods are appropriate for your research. For example, you might want to use regression analysis if you are looking for a relationship between expenditures per pupil and SAT scores.

Preliminary Outline: A preliminary outline helps you think the research problem through. Keep in mind that this preliminary outline is just that—preliminary. It should not be thought of as engraved in stone. Once the research process is moving along, you may want to make minor or even major changes in the outline.

¹ Developed by Dr. Nolan J. Argyle for his students, and used in PADM 7300. A version of this is also in the *VSU Dissertation and Thesis Guide*. Students may find this useful, but should tailor this to the requirements spelled out by the course instructor.

Annotated Bibliography: The final element of the proposal is an annotated bibliography. For this proposal, you must have a minimum of five items in your preliminary bibliography.

Annotated Bibliography Entry (Sample)

Argyle, Nolan J. 1993. "Administrative Thought in Colonial America," *Southeastern Political Review* 21: 30-56.

This article examines the intellectual heritage of the American administrative state. According to the author, the founding fathers who developed the administrative structure of the new nation drew on a rich intellectual heritage, a heritage that helped shaped their worldview; a worldview further shaped by the intense questioning of the relationship between church and state that dominated administrative development during this era, as well as by arguments concerning the proper relationship of the state to the individual. An understanding of the forces shaping the worldview of the founding fathers provides the contemporary student of administration with a greater appreciation of current arguments concerning the nature of the modern American administrative state.