

### Definition of genre

Research and grant proposals outline proposed plans for research. Ideally, your proposal will persuade readers to support your plans, whether academically (e.g. giving you permission to pursue that senior thesis project or dissertation), financially (e.g. giving you money or other support), or both. Proposals are usually discipline and funding-source specific. Read and follow the department or application directions carefully. Some institutions will reject applications if guidelines are not followed exactly.

### Actions to take

The Social Science Research Council makes the following recommendations in “The Art of Writing Proposals”:

- Capture your audience’s attention early on by stating your thesis forcefully and directly.
- Use the structure of the proposal to make it easy for readers to find answers to three important questions:
  - What will the proposed project teach us that is new?
  - Why is it worth knowing?
  - How will we know the conclusions are valid?
- Establish context, explain the payoff, describe methodologies, and specify objectives.

### Format

We cannot emphasize enough that standards are discipline-specific. Consult with someone in your department or field to confirm you are meeting style expectations.

The Foundation Center, which links non-profit grant-seekers with philanthropic organizations, recommends the following format for grant proposals:

- *Executive summary* (1 page): an umbrella statement of your case and summary of the entire proposal. Describe the problem, explain how the project will provide a solution, summarize funding needs, and describe your organization and its expertise.
- *Statement of need* (2 pages): explains why this project is necessary. Describe goals and subsidiary objectives.
- *Project description* (3 pages): the nuts and bolts explanation of how the project will be implemented and evaluated. Answer how (methodology), when (timeline), and why (feasibility)

and reliability). Explain staffing needs, evaluation processes, and sustainability of the proposed project.

- *Budget* (1 page): a financial description of the project plus explanatory notes. Provide a numerical expense budget, a description of other funding sources, and a narrative description of the budget.
- *Organization information* (1 page): describes the history and governing structure of the organization/group carrying out the research, and its primary activities, audiences, and services.
- *Conclusion* (2 paragraphs): a summary of the proposal's main points.

## Helpful links

<http://researchguides.library.wisc.edu/content.php?pid=16143&sid=108601>

A thorough bibliography of handbooks on grant writing.

<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/1998/nsf9891/nsf9891.htm>

From the National Science Foundation's division of undergraduate education, this comprehensive and detailed guide to grant writing includes program information, prewriting strategies, grant-writing guidelines, evaluation criteria, and advice on what to do once a proposal is—or isn't—accepted.

[http://www.ssrc.org/fellowships/art\\_of\\_writing\\_proposals.page](http://www.ssrc.org/fellowships/art_of_writing_proposals.page)

"The Art of Writing Proposals: Some Candid Suggestions for Applicants to Social Science Research Council Competitions," an online guide by Adam Przeworski and Frank Salomon of the Social Science Research Council.

<http://fdncenter.org/learn/shortcourse/prop1.html>

An online "Proposal Writing Short Course" courtesy of the Foundation Center. "Founded in 1956, the Center is the nation's leading authority on philanthropy and is dedicated to serving grantseekers, grantmakers, researchers, policymakers, the media, and the general public."

<http://www.learnerassociates.net/proposal/>

S. Joseph Levine's guide to grant writing from Michigan State University also provides information on developing a sound research project. Particularly geared for projects that propose social service and community partnerships.

[http://www.willamette.edu/dept/saga/carson/bad\\_proposal.htm](http://www.willamette.edu/dept/saga/carson/bad_proposal.htm)

From Willamette University, this useful site gives tips on what NOT to do—because sometimes the best model is a negative model.