

Developing a paper proposal for a research paper

Note: This is meant to be a guide NOT a sentence by sentence structure for your paper. It is meant to give you ideas that you should be considering before you begin to write it.

I. More than anything - this paper proposal is for YOU!

1. It is something that a teacher, parent, or friend CAN read and give advice, but it is really for you to organize your thoughts about the research project that you are undertaking.
2. It is good for self evaluation.
3. This step comes shortly after the initial research question and the preliminary bibliography as it forces you to articulate in writing the “road map” of your research project which you developed in your head as you set your research question.

II. The paper proposal is broken into four sections

1. Section 1: Pertinent background Information — 1/4 of the paper proposal word/space limit.
 1. In this section you will briefly describe the historical situation.
 2. You will define key players (people, groups, institutions)
 3. You will define key terminology (jargon needed to understand the topic (i.e. Any thing that might be ambiguous, vague or potentially create confusion or misdirection, e.g. “Cold War,” “Nationalism,” “Feudalism,”)).
2. Section 2: The question you seek to answer — a short section consisting of the following:
 1. In this section you will state your research question.
 2. You will consider the *causes* and *consequences of change* and/or *continuity*
 - Which you will also consider when you develop the scope.
 3. You will explain why this research question is of historical *significance* (and thus, is not trivial).
 4. When you write out your scope in section 3 — you may (you often will) realize that you need to adjust your question to match what you say in section three. Sometimes it is helpful to write section 3 first then go back and fill in section 2.
3. Section 3: You will set the scope of the investigation — About 1/4 to 1/2 of the word/space limit.
 1. In this section you outline the limits of the investigation (not all will apply to every investigation).
 1. The focus of the investigation.
 - To develop the focus consider the *causes* and *consequences of changes* or *continuity* over time and determine which aspects are best for YOUR investigation. Which have answers that are pretty well set and would therefore only lead to summary, and which have answers that allow of unique *perspectives* to drive the investigation.
 2. The time period that you will limit your investigation.
 - (e.g. I am focusing very specifically on Galileo’s discussions after 1604, with special attention to his writings between the 1616 decree and his book *Dialogue on Two Chief World Systems* published in 1632.)
 3. The geographic area(s) that you will limit the investigation.
 - (e.g. I am limiting the investigation to the wealthy people of Hong Kong and not extending it to those in Taiwan or Mainland China).
 - (For the Galileo examples above, this does not apply as it is evident that I am focusing on interactions of one person wherever he may have traveled).
 4. The people(s) involved in the investigation.
 - (e.g. I am trying to understand the way Galileo viewed Christianity in his scientific investigations and not the way in which his rivals viewed his Christianity or his scientific endeavors.)
 2. You very much want to think about who/what will be excluded.
4. Section 4: The bibliographic background — about 1/4 of the word/space limit.
 1. This is NOT an annotated bibliography (which may be an additional part of a paper proposal or a separate assignment).
 2. First you will list key secondary sources that are pertinent to the investigation.
 - Include the perspective or approach of that historian.
 3. Then you will list primary source collections that will be beneficial to the investigation.
 - You are not listing every single primary source in this proposal, but you are including the types of archival evidence that is needed, stating where those sources can be found (specifically).
 - (e.g. In investigating the experiences of fans attending college football games at UGA during world World War II, I will utilize the UGA student Newspaper *The Red and Black* whose archived issues can be accessed online at the University of Georgia’s archive website. The student produced yearbooks at UGA and GT are available online. In addition, the Atlanta Journal’s newspaper archives are online though the AJC. However, there are some letters and scrapbooks from parents of UGA football players that are listed on the UGA archives website, but are only available in person. These might be helpful to specifically investigate at family fans at those games, but may not be feasible at this time.
 - [This last sentence, “may not be feasible...,” is this a limitation that derails the entire project?]