

Writing Conference Proposals and Research Applications

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Part 1. 3-4 p.m.

1. General considerations (5 min)
2. Summary of Proposal (15 min)
3. Detailed Description (15-20 min)
4. Conference Abstract (10 min)
5. Q&A (10 min)

Part 2. 4-6 p.m.

Workshop: sample proposals

1. General considerations

- Think about your audience
- When to speak to your peers, when not to speak to your peers.
- Temporality: past or future oriented?
- Observe the instructions
- Ask for help

2. Summary of Proposal (1 page)

3 moves:

1. **What do you want to do?**
Situating the project. Identify the problem/gap
2. **How are you going to do it?**
What is your plan? Provide a brief overview of your method and where you will undertake this research.
3. **What's the impact?**
Who stands to benefit from this research and how? How will you ensure it reaches them? Will stakeholders be involved and, if so, how?

3. Detailed Description (6 pages)

3 sections:

Objectives

Context

Methodology

3. Detailed Description (6 pages)

Objectives

- The objectives section of your proposal identifies what you hope to *achieve* by doing the research.
- The objectives should be clear, precise, and achievable within the funding timeframe.
- Use bullet points to make your objectives stand out (but don't exceed 4).
- Use action verbs (e.g., develop, create, foster, engage, advance...).
- This is the shortest, most concise section of your proposal.
- To identify your objectives, think about the questions you want to answer and think ahead to your outcomes (e.g., what you hope to produce/create).

3. Detailed Description (6 pages)

Objectives

Questions to guide your objectives section:

- What do you want to know?
- What do you hope to accomplish?
- What do you hope to demonstrate?
- Why does it matter to you? Why does it matter to anybody else?

Suggested starting sentences:

- The aim of this project is to...
- The over-arching research question guiding this project is...

3. Detailed Description (6 pages)

Context

The tasks of the context are to:

1. Articulate the idea in clear, simple terms (avoiding jargon and technical language).
2. Situate the idea: this is the current state of things and here's where my idea fits (e.g., my idea is current).
3. Demonstrate the need with evidence (the literature review).
4. Identify the gap the idea is filling and the contribution it's going to make: addressing the "So what?"

3. Detailed Description (6 pages)

A note about “literature reviews”:

1. They are *not* summaries of the published work that’s out there.
2. They *synthesize* existing arguments in the literature to identify the controversies, the debates, and the knowledge gaps.
3. *How* you synthesize is governed by the following questions:
 - How can I demonstrate to my reader that my idea and objectives are current, relevant, timely, and urgent?
 - How can I demonstrate to my reader that there is a *need* for my project?

Let the answers to these questions guide your lit. review.

3. Detailed Description (6 pages)

Structuring the Context Section

1. Introduction (1-2 paragraphs; 200-400 words)

- Positions the project within the appropriate societal or scholarly context for the review.
- Identifies the overall state of the field and the conflict, gaps, problem area, need, or opportunity.

3. Detailed Description (6 pages)

Structuring the Context Section

2. **The body** (5-6 paragraphs, roughly 1,000-1,200 words).

4 main moves:

- Situate the project, situate the problem.
- Synthesize current work in the field by highlighting key themes, issues, gaps.
- Flag the “So What?”: finds opportunities to flag why this is important, timely, and how it connects to your overall objectives.
- What led you here?: address relevant, previous work you have done on the topic that has led to this current investigation.

3. Detailed Description (6 pages)

Methodology

What are you going to do and how you are going to do it?

Your methodology section allows readers/assessors to determine the viability of your project: if your approach is sound, achievable, whether it will lead to reliable results, and whether your budget is justified.

Questions assessors have in the back of their minds as they read methodology sections:

- Is this approach appropriate for the research question?
- Will the method allow the research question to be answered in a reliable way?
- Is the method possible? Achievable? Can it be accomplished in the timeframe and budget proposed?

3. Detailed Description (6 pages)

The goal of your methodology section:

- To create a *clear, detailed plan* that you can *put into practice*. That is, *following this plan and its timeline will allow you to realize your project within the funding timeframe*.

This should be written in such clear, direct language that anyone can pick up your methodology section and follow exactly what you've done to realize the project.

Remember, your assessors may not be specialists in the field.

3. Detailed Description (6 pages)

Methodology section

What you need to establish:

1. Name the study design/method you are using: Qualitative? Mixed methods? Practice-based? Archival?, etc.
2. Conceptualize the operational plan for your project: the procedures you will follow and the tasks you will undertake to complete your project.
3. Justify these choices: Why is it necessary to follow this procedure? How will it ensure sound, reliable results? How will it allow you to realize your objectives?
4. Indicate the proposed timeline along the way as you introduce the procedure and tasks, e.g., In the first month of the project, I plan to...; in the second stage of the project development (October-November), I will....

Conference Abstract

What is the conference abstract?

An abstract is a concise description of your project's *central argument and aims* in roughly 250-300 words.
Think of it as a strong thesis paragraph.

Conference Abstract

The 3 moves of the conference abstract:

1. **The problem and the stakes:** What have you done and why does it matter?
2. **Methodology:** How did you undertake this analysis and why? Where are you situated in relation to this object of analysis?
3. **Argument:** What's your argument? (The structure of your paper will be determined by the stages of your argument.)

Conference Abstract

Abstracts should include

1. The name of the conference to which you are submitting the abstract.
2. The title of the paper and author's name
3. Clear, concise language.

Try to avoid:

1. Direct quotations: if you need to cite, follow MLA guidelines or Chicago with footnotes.
2. Jargon.

Q&A

Any questions?