



Undergraduate Awards for Creative and Research Projects: Creating a Proposal

What is a Research Proposal?

A research proposal is a short document that identifies and outlines the main components of your research. For UHP Awards proposal, these components include

- The purpose of your research
- The intended audience
- Your role
- A problem statement or hypothesis
- A brief description of intended methodology, data, and materials
- Expected outcomes
- Itemized budget with justification
- Requested information items, such as prior research experience and support, etc. (listed on the proposal cover page)

But What if I'm Interested in Doing a Creative Project?

Many of the components are the same. You will still want to identify and describe the purpose of your work, your audience, your specific role, and a description of the information or materials you need to fulfill the project. While you won't necessarily have a problem you are trying to amend, you might have an idea that your creative project will help to answer (The idea that Broadway musicals influence the way society views controversial issues, for example, can be the jumping off point to a scholarly paper, a critical reading, a sociological study, or the creation of your own musical—depending on how you choose to respond to that question.). Consequently, you may either have very specific expected outcomes, or none at all.

Writing the Proposal

The Purpose of Your Project

There are many reasons for doing a creative or research project; first, because it is finding out something you don't know, solving a problem, or creating something new. You could write a thesis to review and explain collated factual data. You could also conduct analytical research to study a particular subject in depth. You could discuss, debate and/or argue a certain topic, or come out with a new hypothesis/theory. On the other hand, you could also try persuading others to believe in what you are proposing.

You will often find conflicting ideas, biases, and other influences while doing your project. You may even discover things that are contradictory to your personal thoughts, ethics, and ideals. These could hinder your work, give rise to doubts, or cause a lack of interest in the product. Quality work demands objectivity, caution in assertion, solid backing from sources/experimental results, and clear, rational thinking. You should be prepared for contingencies, to challenge widely accepted norms/rules in your quest to further knowledge.

Your Audience

You will need to identify the audience for your work. Obviously, if you are doing a scientifically inclined study into the effects of Neon atoms under intense heat, say, your target audience will not likely be Shakespearean thespians. However, your research may also inform several fields (e.g., child psychology research might be of interest not just to psychologists, but also to teachers, doctors, and parents). Your target audience determines what style of writing you may use, and/or what theories and experiments to apply.

Your target audience should easily identify with what you are trying to do (whether they agree with it or not). Your research should try and persuade your readers to stand with you on your findings, while your creative work should appeal to people's ideas, emotions, or points of view. It should contain adequate information without being unnecessary or boring. Your purpose is not to rehash information that is easily available but to come up with something new or worthwhile for your audience to think about.

Your Role

Following from above, the work is your own. You have to display your knowledge and points of view in order to be taken seriously. First and foremost, you must be extremely familiar with what you are setting out to do (hence the proposal). When you quote sources, references, and other types of background material, use the information to propel your points of view rather than those of the sources.

Problem Statement, Argument, or Hypothesis

Similar to debates, you can use one sentence, statement, or question as a jump-off point to a complete body of research. This opener, though, should not be too broad. For example, "Drinking Too Much Coffee is Bad For Health" is too generalized. What is covered in the term 'health'? What is considered 'bad'? Is this from a social, psychological or medical point of view? Does this statement apply to all types of coffee (including decaffeinated coffee)?

*Methodology, Materials, and Data**

This section should outline how you plan to go about doing your work. For example, to find out how many people prefer jogging to walking, would you ask people on the street directly, hand out questionnaires, appeal for volunteers over the Internet, or make up your own figures? (The last option is definitely not recommended!). If you are trying to find out how fast beans germinate under UV light (if at all), how would you go about doing it? What about controlled experiments/samples?

Expected Outcomes

Sometimes, your opener may be a new hypothesis that you are exploring or a creative work meant to provoke a particular response. Perhaps you could be working towards a certain expected outcome that you intend to prove. If your work is of this nature, you might wish to include this in your proposal. \

Budget Justification

You request any amount up to a maximum of \$2,000. The reviewers of your proposal need to know how you will be applying the funds so they can judge the reasonableness of your proposal. The UHP needs to know so it can judge the appropriateness of the expenditures and fulfill its obligations to assure proper expenditure of funds.

So, Why Bother?

The UHP awards are a great opportunity for you to start your research career, to explore an area of potential future interest to you, to develop a relationship with a faculty mentor, to enable you to try out that idea you've always wanted to try. The proposal is definitely worth the trouble!

Is It Set In Stone?

Research almost never proceeds as planned. If you receive an award, the grant guidelines will explain the kind of flexibility you will have and at what point you would need to obtain approval for a modification in your proposed.

If you have any questions regarding how to write a proposal, feel free to contact the UHP Director, Dr. Richard L. Blanton through e-mail at larry_blanton@ncsu.edu. We can help you to find potential mentors, but you can look for your own by visiting the web site of the NC State Office of Undergraduate Research (<http://www.ncsu.edu/undergrad-research>).

Adapted excerpt from "So, You Want A PhD?" by J. NG © 1997-9.

*If conducting research with human subjects, students must understand and comply with Institutional Review Board Guidelines (www.ncsu.edu/sparcs/IRB/human.html). For research with animals, refer to departmental IACUC guidelines (www.ncsu.edu/sparcs/compliance/iacuc.html).