

RESEARCH PROPOSAL INFORMATION SHEET

ENGL 102.2

WRITING AND RESEARCH

In the real world, people are not allowed to spend time doing research on a project unless they first get approval for that project. To do that, they have to submit a proposal. Many instructors and degree programs also require a proposal before approving a research topic. All of these authorities use different forms and processes, so the proposal that we will use is generic and designed simply to get you used to having to know what you are doing with your research and why anyone would want to fund/listen/read what you have to say on your subject. This proposal will be evaluated and returned to you. It must be approved before you can proceed to the next step of the research process, just like in real life.

The proposal for this class is a written document consisting of AT LEAST the following items:

- ü A thesis/research question -- that is a question that specifically indicates exactly what you expect to say/prove in your paper.
Example: What is the reason for the popularity of assisted suicide? Or What are the childhood traits/tendencies that point towards someone growing up to be a serial killer?
Notice that the question is very specific, not generic. The research question should be specific to *your* paper, not simply restating your sources' theses.
- ü An understanding of who your intended audience is and what you want them to learn from your paper.
- ü A clear sense of what your audience can or should DO with this information. This is NOT a report. You are NOT just repeating information like an encyclopedia entry – you are supposed to be putting this information into a context. HOW can your audience USE this information? How would you answer them if you presented the information and they said, “So what?”
- ü Specific arguments or supporting points that you are going to make to support your overall thesis/answer your research question.
- ü More than one side -- the proposal should clearly show that you have read and analyzed AT LEAST two different "sides" or perspectives of the issue at hand. You don't have to give equal time to each perspective, but you do need to at least indicate that you haven't just limited your search to sources that "prove" what you believed before you started the research.
- ü Clear indication that you have multiple sources that you can use for arguing your points in your paper. A paper that argues each point with only one source is not a true synthesis research paper – it's just a collection of summaries – and that is NOT what we are looking for.
- ü A clear sense of whether your paper is intended to be persuasive or informative. There's no requirement one way or the other in this class – either approach is fine, but YOU need to know which approach you are taking in order to write a properly focused paper.
- ü An understanding of what background material your reader will need to know before they can understand the specific points and arguments that you want to share with them.

An example of a student research paper proposal is on the next page

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Stanley Student
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Is Ethanol an appropriate solution to our gasoline supply and price problems?

My intended audience is the residents of Central Nebraska who are not familiar with the arguments against corn-based ethanol.

This paper will help the audience become more informed about why corn-based ethanol is considered controversial and present both the arguments for using it and for moving to other forms of ethanol production. My audience will learn exactly what the relationship is between corn production, ethanol production, food prices and the markets. When so much of our local economy is based on this technology, it is extremely important for everyone to understand exactly how all of these are inter-related so that we can make smart decisions for the future.

The paper will first need to explain what ethanol production is and how corn is involved in the process. A bit of history about corn-based ethanol and how it's been used for economic stimulus and supported by huge tax breaks for decades will be important too.

The future of corn-based ethanol needs to be presented – what are the current production levels and what can be produced in the future? How much can corn-based ethanol help reduce our dependence on foreign oil?

The effect of diverting the corn to ethanol production and away from food production is another important point to research. If we save money on fuel but pay even more for our food, we haven't gained anything. There are sources that argue that the ethanol diversion cripples food producers and raises their costs horribly, but there are other sources that argue that it makes no difference whatsoever because we keep producing more corn each year.

Alternatives to corn-based ethanol need to be explained. Americans in general only think of corn when they think of ethanol, especially here in Central Nebraska. The audience needs to know about alternatives, including how Brazil uses sugar cane.

The political element of tax breaks, embargoes and tariffs that keep cheaper ethanol from other countries out of our country is an important point to include. This might be controversial, because these policies are there to protect our farmers and local ethanol plants, but that's why the paper needs to include them – the local media, farm organizations and governments that want these ethanol plants and their jobs are not letting people know this information.

The sources for this paper include several government documents from the Department of Energy and the Ag Department. There are documents from the National Corn Growers Association arguing for ethanol from corn and from academic journals arguing that ethanol can never produce enough energy to solve our oil problems. One of the authors arguing against corn-based ethanol is even a former executive for Cargill, a major ethanol producer.