

Submission of the Assignment

- Tuesday, 10/30 before class: Submit an electronic copy of the **draft proposal** online.
- Tuesday, 10/30 @ 12:00pm: Bring enough hard copies for your other peer group members to class. During class, you will read the proposal of your peer group member(s), offer written feedback on the form provided, and discuss each other's proposals and feedback. This class will meet from 12-2:45p with lunch provided.
- Monday, 11/05 @ 12:00pm: **Revised research proposal** and **revision memo**: online.
- Revisions should be based on peer feedback; you will not receive feedback from the instructor on the draft proposal. The instructor will provide written and oral feedback on the revised proposal; one-on-one meetings will be scheduled between 11/7-14.
- Use 12-pt font, 1.5 or double spacing, and 1.25" margins. **Include page numbers.**
- Length should be 8-10 pages, not including bibliography. Save trees: **print double-sided.**

Purposes of the Assignment

The main purposes of the project proposal are to give you an early start on defining and executing your project, and to give you feedback and suggestions. You will get feedback and suggestions from the instructor and your peer group. Further, the research proposal is a common genre of writing not only in academia but also many areas of work. At the very least, you will have to submit a prospectus for your senior thesis research project next year.

Although the most important part of the proposal is the content in terms of presenting the research question, its relevance, and your planned empirical project; it is also important to present it well. As you can see below, the grade depends partly on mechanics (unlike all the memos).

Components of the Assignment

Your proposal will build upon the memos you have been writing throughout the first part of the semester. You may recycle some of your memos here, as appropriate, but your proposal should be intelligible to a reader not familiar with your project or the class.

1) Description of your broad research topic and focused question:

Begin by providing a concise description of the general topic you have chosen to focus on for this class project, and present a single or two closely related research questions that you will investigate. By this point, you should have committed to a focused research question that you feel can feasibly be carried out in the remainder of the semester (7 weeks!). That said, I recognize that some projects will continue to evolve as you learn more about your topic and data.

2) Explain the Significance of the Question by Situating it in the Literature:

Explain why this question is relevant and interesting from two perspectives: empirically (ie, the case, place, or specific phenomenon) and conceptually or theoretically. To these ends, you will need to refer to secondary source literature surrounding your topic, so that you can explain (contextualize) where your question fits in the broader related literature. Your literature review for the proposal does not need to be as comprehensive as that which I will expect in the

final paper, but it does need to be enough that I am convinced that (a) you know what you are talking about (history/ background of the empirical case/ phenomenon); and (b) that you are familiar with the way your subject fits into at least one (and maybe more) existing body(ies) of literature. Especially, you should be confident that no one has already answered your question or that if they have, there is reason to feel it is inadequate.

3) *Design and Methodology of Primary Data Analysis:*

Your project for the class must include original analysis of some kind of primary data. This is perhaps the most crucial section of the proposal, because in it you must convince the reader that you have 1) thought out what is an appropriate means to answering your question, 2) done enough research to establish what primary and secondary resources out there exist and can contribute to your topic, and 3) examined these resources thoroughly enough to have determined that they are sufficient to investigate your question. This section should cover two things: What are your primary data and your research design/ methodology? Why are this data and design appropriate (and what are some limitations)?

It is expected that the primary data analysis will be of small scale; I am more concerned that you take the time to develop a thoughtful and effective research design than that you spend a lot of time collecting data. Convince us that your research design and methods directly answer your question, and are feasible. Make sure to explain/ justify all of your research design and data selection decisions, such as, why these cases? These interviewees? This sample of newspaper articles?

Finally, please also include a Timetable/ Workplan as an appendix, that is, a brief schedule of when you will accomplish the remaining work for the paper, such as primary data collection, data analysis, reading the secondary literature, and writing.

4) *Hypothesis/ Tentative Findings:*

I do not expect you to have much in the way of findings yet at this point. But, **you should have gotten your hands on, and started looking at, at least some data by now.** (Ex: a single interview, examining a single primary document, several news sources, etc.) This section should cover two things. First, based on a look at your initial data, discuss one or two interesting or surprising things you have learned so far. Have you run into any challenges or problems with the data or methods you intend to use?

Second, you should discuss how you will be analyzing the primary materials and what you think you might find. In other words, what is your hypothesis: a possible answer (or answers) to your question? What sorts of things will you be looking for in the data, and how will they help you determine if your hypothesis is correct – or incorrect? How does the 'literature' you are engaging with help you think about possible answers to your question? (At this point, you may have one hypothesis, or several. It may be relatively specific, or fairly broad. But it is important to show that you have thought about how you might answer your question, and how your data will help you come up with an answer).

5) *Research Ethics and Human Subjects Considerations:*

All proposals must include a discussion of research ethics. If your research project will involve human subjects (e.g., interviews, surveys, or participant-observation), this discussion must cover the following: (a) *Risks and Impacts*: What risks, if any, might your research project introduce for your subjects? What kind of impacts could your research activities have on the people, organizations, or community? (b) *Informed Consent*: How do you present yourself and your research project to people and ask for their consent to participate? If you will do interviews or surveys, you must use a written or oral consent script, include a draft as an appendix to the proposal. Examples are on the course website in the “Proposal First Draft” assignment. (c) *Confidentiality*: How do you expect to handle this? Do you think confidentiality will be necessary? Why or why not? If so, or if individuals request it, how will you ensure that your final paper will not disclose identities?

If your project does not involve living human beings, include a paragraph that discusses potential ethical issues if someone were to investigate your topic through interviews and/or observation. Concentrate on the questions under (a), above.

6) *Citations:*

Make sure to properly cite your sources of information about the research topic and the literature. All citations included in the text must have an accompanying entry in a separate bibliography at the end of the paper. Refer to the ASA Style Guide (available on the course website on the front page) for citation and bibliography formatting. Use parenthetical citations and only use footnotes for issues of substance, not citation.

7) *Peer Feedback:*

In class on Tuesday, 10/30, peer groups will exchange copies of proposals. Students will read and comment on each other’s proposals during class using a feedback form and then discuss each proposal in person with the peer group. These feedback forms, any marginal comments, and oral discussion will inform the revisions for the final draft of the proposal.

8) *Revision Memo:*

This memo has two components. List the key points of feedback from your peer group, then discuss what changes you have made in response to the feedback you received.

Evaluation of the Assignment

The *proposal grade* is broken up in the following way:

Clear and focused research question	20%
Explanation of the significance of the project demonstrating familiarity with relevant secondary literature	25%
A research design and plan for gathering and analyzing data to answer your question, representing a feasible scope given the time frame, including research ethics	45%
Overall structure and clarity of the paper including citations & writing mechanics	10%