Chapter Seven

The Project Proposal

The Assignment

The project proposal is the final draft of the project you have worked on all term. Like the presentation, it should be a leadership statement that puts information into action by proposing a research-justified solution to a well-defined problem. Unlike the presentation, though, it should take a specific form, which is laid out below and illustrated in some of the sample papers that follow. The guidelines for preparing this final paper will probably not conform to those of your work place or those spelled out for specific grant applications you might be considering. These guidelines, though, should be readily adaptable to any "real-world" submission. We encourage you to revise your final project for submission in your work place or in your future graduate work, but for the time being focus on fulfilling the requirements of our class.

Remember that the heart of the proposal is a problem, paradigm, and plan that work together to create a unified concept. The paradigm should grow organically out of the way you define the problem, and the plan you present should be clearly rationalized by the paradigm. If you unify and focus your argument, you will be able to present a well-organized and logical paper.

The final draft of the project proposal should be from 15-20 pages inclusive, single-spaced (though your Works Cited should be double spaced in keeping with MLA guidelines). You should also try to do the following:

- Strive for a consistent professional tone throughout.
- Number your pages clearly.
- Unify your paper as best you can using rhetorical, design and signposting strategies.
- Use clearly distinguished headings and subheads to help guide your reader through the parts of each section.
- Use bullets or numbers to list items for easy comprehension.
- Label and number all graphs and figures for easy reference.
- Unify the paper with a consistent typography and style.

- Polish your writing for style and emphasis.

- Proofread for errors in spelling, grammar, and syntax.

The Parts of the Proposal

The formal aspects of the final proposal help you to present your overall argument in a way that is useful for your reader. There are fourteen parts of the project proposal, most of which should be labeled and presented in order (with the exception of visual graphic aids, which should ideally be incorporated into the body of the paper with individual titles):

1. Cover Letter -- generally one full page (not numbered or titled)
2. Title Page -- one page (not numbered or titled)
3. Abstract -- one page (Roman numeral "i")
4. Table of Contents -- one page (Roman numeral "ii")
5. Table of Figures -- one page (Roman numeral "iii")
6. Executive Summary – one to two pages (Roman numerals "iv-v")
7. Introduction -- generally more than two pages (Arabic numeral "1+")
8. Research (or Literature Review)
9. Plan (or Procedures)
10. Budget
11. Discussion (perhaps including an Evaluation Plan)
12. Works Cited
13. Visual Aids (or Figures)—incorporated into the text when possible
14. Appendix (if necessary)

1. Cover Letter

Like the cover letter that accompanied your resume, the letter of transmittal is intended to explain and interpret the attached document. It should explain why the reader has received your proposal and it should try to persuade the reader to examine it closely, offering details about the content intended to interest or intrigue him or her. The letter of transmittal should respond to the situation of reading and answer the reader's likely questions: "Why is this on my desk?" and "Why should I read it when I have a dozen other things to do?"

The transmittal letter can take the form of a letter (for a reader outside of your organization) or memo (for a reader within your organization). While an increasing number of transmittals are written in e-mail form, where the proposal is usually an attached file, we ask that you adhere to the traditional paper forms for the purposes of the course.

If it is a letter, it should follow the full block style, in which all of the elements are flush with the left margin in this order:

- Return Address (your name and address)
- Date (for the purposes of the class, use the due date of the final proposal)
- Recipient's address (including name, title, organization, and business address)
- Salutation ("Dear" plus formal address and name)
- Body (see discussion below)
- Closing ("Sincerely") and signature

If you are using company stationery, then you will not need to include your address. If it is prepared as a memo, then it should be written on company stationery (or facsimile) and prepared in memo form:

- To: addressee's full name
- From: your full name and handwritten initials
- Date: today's date
- Subject: a line indicating your proposal topic
- Body: see discussion below

Many of the rules for writing the cover letter to accompany your resume obtain here. Since your imagined reader probably attended your presentation (or, at least, you created a context where he or she was imagined in the room), you may want to begin by reminding the reader of that event, explaining that this is the full version of that proposal. Whether or not you have met your reader before, begin by explaining why you sent him or her your proposal and why it should be of interest. Emphasize what you know about the reader's interests and emphasize the chief way the proposal matches those interests.

The central paragraph (or central two paragraphs) should offer an overview of the project, highlighting salient details about the problem, paradigm and plan. Again, point to those aspects of your project most likely to interest your reader.

The final paragraph should invite further contact, offering the most convenient way for the reader to get in touch with you (perhaps by phone or e-mail).

2. Title Page

The page should include the following information:

- Project title

- Submitted by: Your full name and title (or position)
- Submitted to: Your addressee's full name, title, and business address
- Date

You should also indicate somewhere near the bottom of the page what course this paper was prepared for, your instructor's name, and any class information your teacher requests. (This way if your paper gets lost it won't end up on the desk of the imagined audience but will have a chance of getting returned to your instructor).

The title of your project should be carefully chosen and crafted for maximum communication in the shortest space. It is one of the first things the reader sees of your report, and will become the means of referencing it to others. The more communicative power it has the more effective it will be. Strive for to be both clear and memorable. Remember that you can use a two-part title, especially if you want to give your project a catchy title followed by a more technically specific one.

There are many ways to design the title page, and you should do what looks and works best for your specific project. Use white space, color and other page elements to design an attractive image that is consistent with the document design as a whole. You might want to use graphics or pictorial lettering to highlight your topic.

3. Abstract

The abstract should be clearly labeled as an "Abstract" at the top of the page and should be no more than one or two paragraphs in length. The purpose of the abstract is to tell busy people (or their secretaries) how to file your report. It should be written from a disinterested perspective, providing a balanced view of the project idea as though written by an outside party. Usually it is written in the third person or uses passive voice to avoid naming the agent. For the purposes of this class, you should write a relatively long, informative abstract that includes details about your overall argument and covers elements of the problem, paradigm and plan (in that order). Be sure to indicate your rationale and what specific action you want to take. Strive to be maximally communicative within minimal space -- generally between 150 to 300 words.

4. Table of Contents

Clearly label and design your table of contents for easy use. Recognize that the table of contents has two main uses: it helps readers locate the information that interests them most (this is especially true of long reports) and it gives your reader an overview of the project and its parts. You should list all parts of the project listed above (excluding the transmittal letter and visual aids), along with any important subheads. Number the opening parts (abstract, table of contents, table of figures, and executive summary) with small Roman numerals (i, ii, iii) and then use Arabic numbers (1, 2, 3) beginning with the "introduction" section. Use whatever design elements you can to help make the information clear and usable -- indenting subheads, using ellipses to link section names

and page numbers, and aligning all related parts. The style and font should be consistent with the design throughout your document.

You can work up a table by carefully laying out the items in it, but many word processing programs will generate a table for you. In WordPerfect for Windows, for example, look under the Tools menu. In other programs, consult your manual or Help menus.

5. Table of Figures

If your table of contents is short, you might include your table of figures (clearly labeled) on the same page. Otherwise, it should occupy its own page. Ideally, each figure and illustration you use should have a number for easy reference. List the number and title of each figure along with the page on which it appears.

6. Executive Summary

The executive summary should be clearly labeled. This is usually the last thing you write, but it is often the first (and sometimes only) thing that your audience will read closely. It is a "miniature" or condensed version of the paper itself written for busy executives (hence the name). Basically, the executive summary presents your whole argument, *in the order of the paper itself*, with key details and evidence, all in only ten percent of the space of the whole paper (generally no more than two pages for a twenty page proposal). A reader should be able to understand your entire project (including problem, paradigm, and plan) after having only read these two pages. Generally, you should cite critical evidence and sources here, but you should not include illustrations. Unlike the abstract, which is intended for description only, the executive summary can contain persuasive language.

In writing some parts of the paper, you may feel that you are repeating yourself. You are, in a way. But you should recognize that while you may present the same information several times in different parts of the report, each part is intended, in a sense, for a different reader. This part is written for the busy executive. The body of the report is written for the (perhaps same) executive who has time for a closer examination of your ideas.

7. Introduction

There are two purposes of the introduction: to present information about the problem you will address and to forecast your overall argument. Here is where you will want to offer all the information you have on the problem you seek to address. You should try to quantify or define the problem and offer images that help clarify and emphasize the key aspects of it. Focus on those aspects of the problem that will most interest your reader, and suggest by the way you examine or define the problem a direction for approaching it. Close the introduction with a forecasting statement giving your reader a sense of your argument to follow and providing a transition to the next part.

8. Research (or Literature Review)

The research section should open with some reference to the problem (especially by way of transition from the introduction), but should focus mostly on the paradigm for your project. The research you present should explain why you will approach the problem in a particular way; it should also provide a unified rationale for the specific plan of action you describe in your plan. Thus the paradigm is essential for unifying your paper because it shows how the plan of action you will propose is a logical approach to the problem you have defined.

While each of you will have to explore research in a way unique to your topic, all of you should strive to show that you are not merely asserting your approach to the problem based on opinion, politics, or personal view, but that there is a consensus of opinion or a well-documented trend or development that supports your idea. You might discuss examples of similar or related projects you are using as models, focusing on the procedures and plans that worked in those instances and emphasizing the positive results achieved. You might discuss theories that form the basis for your assumption that the plan you have in mind will be effective -- offering evidence and authority to show that your plan is responding to a body of knowledge. If you are planning experimental work that grows out of a well-established scientific paradigm, you should review the tradition of work in the field that you are building on in your research. Remember that the main purpose of the research is to justify your plan of action. Thus, if you plan to educate people about a specific environmental issue, you will likely want to focus more on an effective way (or paradigm) of educating people than you will on that environmental issue (though you will need research on that as well).

One of the purposes of the literature review is to establish your authority, which will stand or fall based on the quality of the research you cite. By demonstrating your command over recognized or paradigmatic research, you show that you have the knowledge and expertise to make valid recommendations. You should strive to find the most useful and authoritative research whenever possible, and you should discuss published research (ideally, research that has been subject to peer review). Many projects will, however, call for a wide range of research sources, including articles, books, internet sources, published government statistics, interviews, surveys, field studies, calculations, and experimental results. You should do your best to evaluate sources and use only the most solid in building your literature review. To use low quality materials in constructing your paper is equivalent to using low quality materials in building a house, and your product will be evaluated and graded (or condemned) accordingly.

9. Plan (or Procedures)

The plan should be as specific as possible and should follow logically from your research. How it is presented will depend upon the specific project you have in mind. If you are proposing a workplace project, you might focus on how your idea will be implemented (perhaps providing a flowchart or time line). If you are proposing to do an experiment, you should lay out the specific procedures you will use. If you are building

something, you will want to describe how it will be built and provide diagrams. You might wish to reference research to support the specific choices you are making, though the research section should provide the bulk of your rationale.

10. Budget

The budget should list everything you will need for your project, from salaries to supplies. Some items may require explanation, which you should supply here as well. Arrange the cost of your budget items in aligned accountant's columns to make your addition clear.

11. Discussion (or Evaluation Plan)

Generally your paper should conclude by summing up your project and making a final pitch for its value. If you are proposing a project whose results can be tested in some way, then you should also offer an evaluation plan.

12. Works Cited

This section should list all sources of information cited in your paper in alphabetical order. The bibliography should be prepared according to MLA Style, which is covered in the supplementary text for this class and in the MLA Style Guide in Chapter Four. For those who want extra guidance, you might consult The MLA Handbook, which is available in the Reference section of any campus library.

13. Visual Aids (or Figures)

You should have at least three graphic aids that are visual representations of numerical information. These might include graphs, tables, charts, or maps. In addition to these three, you may include drawings, photographs, flowcharts, maps, organization charts, Gantt charts, timelines, diagrams, or floor plans. Each visual graphic aid should be numbered (e.g.: Figure 1, Figure 2, etc.) and should have a title. If the graphic is based on information from a source, then you should have a citation line at the bottom (i.e.: Source: Alvarez 26). If you are able to incorporate your graphics into the body of the paper, do so. If you cannot incorporate your graphics, then include them at the end in an appendix or inter-paginate them directly following the first reference to them.

14. Appendix (optional)

If you have other information that doesn't exactly fit into your text, you could include it as an appendix (which is literally appended to the end of your document). For example, if you cite a map or chart which is too big to be incorporated into the body of your text, you could label it as Appendix A. Be sure to list it under Appendices on your table of contents, and refer to it in the text as follows: [See Appendix A, p. 20].

Procedures Manual Assignment

For many technical writers, writing good directions to other people on how to do something is an integral part of their job. Researchers must document their research procedures, industrial technical writers must often write the instruction manual that accompanies a new product. As with all technical writing, an awareness of your reading audience is crucial to writing a good procedures manual.

As you work toward your final project, think about the Plan section. Many people at this point have a good general idea of what they want to do, but have not considered the specific details involved in carrying it out successfully. Taking some time now to think about the details, amounts, and materials will help you have a clearer idea of the project as a whole. Without attention to the details, you won't be able to generate an accurate budget.

First, consider who will be doing the project or the research. How much do they know? How much do they need to know? Are they professionals or volunteers? How specific will you have to be? Then, consider your funding source. How much do they know, or need to know? What level of specificity would be appropriate in explaining your project to them?

You have two choices in this assignment.

1. You could write a set of directions to the people who will be helping you carry out the project. For instance, if you are starting a soup kitchen, you might write up a set of directions as to how you will serve the people who come to eat. Will you have a buffet style or a sit-down service? Will you allow seconds? What should a worker do if a soup kitchen guest wants to use the phone or needs a ride? You could incorporate this assignment into your final project as an appendix.

2. You could generate a list of procedures in order to demonstrate to the funding source how the project will be carried out. This differs from #1 because it is less detailed and broader in perspective. The stages you might write about setting up a soup kitchen might be to find an adequate space, to make arrangements with the USDA for free food donations, to train workers, and to advertise the opening day. You could expand this assignment and make it your Plan or Procedures section of the final project.

The most important thing to do in writing instructions is to figure out the logical sequence of events. What must come first, what logically comes second, and so on?

Using either #1 or #2, write up a brief one-two page procedures manual. Explain each step as thoroughly as possible.

Peer Revision Day for Final Project Proposal

Use the following steps to guide you in commenting on a peer's paper.

1. The first thing you should do is to check and see that your partner has every required section IN THE RIGHT ORDER. Each section should start on a new page (the only exception would be if the writer wanted to combine the Table of Figures and the Table of Contents on one page).

2. Check to see that each section contains what it is supposed to contain. This is the most crucial issue to look for on Rough Draft #1. Invariably, people have too much plan in the Introduction or too much problem in the Research.

3. Check the format throughout. Check simple things like the pagination and the appearance of the title page. Is the funding source listed as the organization to which the project is being submitted? Is there a date of submission? Is everything capitalized uniformly? What could be done to improve the aesthetic impression of the title page?

4. Critique your partner's letter of transmittal. [Remember, your letter should be paper clipped to the actual project—it should not be stapled or bound in.] Does it include some reasoning as to why the particular funding source will be interested in the project? Does it ever so briefly outline the main themes of the project—problem, paradigm, plan? Does it follow standard business letter format? Is the letter signed?

5. Starting with the Abstract, look over the whole project to see that all section subheadings are uniform. If one is centered at the top of the page, they all should be. If one is in bold, they all should be. The same font should be used for each section heading. Ask these questions about the abstract itself: Is it dispassionate? Is it just an objective summary of the contents of the project? Does it contain some reference to the main thrust of each section of the project? Yes, you will be repeating yourself, but that's okay.

6. Do you like the looks of the Tables of Contents and Figures? Why or why not? What could be done? Are titled subheadings within the sections given along with page numbers for easy reference?

7. Look over the Executive Summary. Is the writer keeping the needs and objectives of the funding source in mind as he or she summarizes the project?

8. Check to see if the writer is citing all information that needs to be citing, and that he or she is using the proper format. Use your citation style guides to help you here.