**Guidelines for Proposal Writing in Humanities and Social Sciences**

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Source:Adam Pzreworski and Frank Salomon. “On the Art of Writing Proposals.” *www.ssrc.org/publications/view/the-art-of-writing-proposals/*

**Successful proposals tend to…**

1. Quickly and forcefully demonstrate a project’s “conceptual innovation, methodological rigor, and rich, substantive content.”

2. Address the call for proposals’ explicit requirements as well as the audience’s implicit expectations and needs.

**So, how can you ensure your proposals do these things? Try these tips…**

* Use your opening paragraph/page to immediately answer these three questions:

1. What are we going to learn that we do not know now?

2. Why is it worth knowing?

3. How will we know that the conclusions are valid?

* At first, answer these questions in the broadest and simplest terms possible. Caveats, nuances, and complexities can come later.
* Generally, keep your focus on big, reader-friendly ideas rather than technical detail specific to your sub-discipline. Keep your language jargon-free, rather than technical. Remember that even readers well versed in your general discipline may not be familiar with terminology specific to your (sub)field.
* Provide thorough and robust context for what your project will teach its audience. That is, showcase a current and comprehensive bibliography.
* Show how your project is timely and how it addresses some larger abiding problem (in the world, in a global region, in some walk of life, in your discipline, etc.).
* Emphasize surprising or counterintuitive problems that gave rise to your research question: “We might expect that…., yet historical evidence shows just the contrary.”
* State how your methods will enable you to answer your research questions. Specify how you will collect data, analyze it, and test its validity. Help readers understand which parts of your methodology are standard in your field, and which are more innovative.
* Demonstrate that you’re prepared to face the technical or linguistic challenges of your research. For example, you have demonstrated mastery in an ancient language, or you have arranged to collaborate with other researchers who have this expertise.
* Describe the final product of your project: manuscript, article, or dissertation.
* Conclude your proposal by revisiting your original research question. “How will research procedures and their products finally connect with the central question? How will you know if your idea was wrong or right?”

**Further Reading:**

“Grant Proposal Guidelines: The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.” *mellon.org/grants/grantmaking-policies-and-guidelines/grant-proposal-guidelines/*

Christina Gillis. “Writing Fellowship Proposals for ACLS Fellowship Competitions.” *www.acls.org/uploadedfiles/publications/programs/writing\_fellowship\_proposals.pdf*

Adam Pzreworski and Frank Salomon. “On the Art of Writing Proposals.” *www.ssrc.org/publications/view/the-art-of-writing-proposals/*

Fulbright project statements and guidelines: *www.cies.org/project-statement-samples*

UT Office of Sponsored Projects: General guidance on seeking funding and drafting grant proposals. *research.utexas.edu/osp*