

Grace 2

*He recognizes the importance of early intervention, but he is not altogether sure what that means in a child's everyday life.*

*The student provides a broad context for understanding autism and who else might be interested in this topic.*

*Finally, he formulates the topic as a series of questions that need to be answered.*

intervention includes the parents as well. It is important for parents to interact with their children early and often, and to work with them to help them develop. Though the individual that I will be working with is already at the end of elementary school, it will still be useful to observe the parent-child interactions, as well as question the parents about what measures were taken early in the child's life.

This topic is important/significant for all those working with children with autism, as well as parents of children with autism. Autism is becoming ever more prevalent in this country, and the world, with more than one in every one hundred children being diagnosed with some form of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The parents need to know how best to interact with, and better understand, their child.

How can parent-child interaction influence the development of a child with autism? This might be a vague question with many different directions in which to take it, but it is still a pertinent question. How might parental interaction in adolescence affect adolescent development? Why should parents work hard to interact with their children with autism? What are the benefits of early intervention? What are the long-term benefits of early intervention programs? What are the effects of good versus poor parental interaction? These questions need to be answered to fully understand the topic and research question.

## WRITING A PROPOSAL

A **proposal** is a formal plan that outlines your objectives for conducting a research project, specifies the methods you intend to use, and describes the implications of your work. In its most basic form, a proposal is an argument that provides a rationale for conducting research and persuades readers that the research is worth pursuing. It is also a tool that helps guide you through various stages of the project. The most immediate benefit of writing a proposal is that through the act of writing—by setting forth an outline of your project—your thinking will become more focused and precise. And yet your thinking may change as you read more about your topic.

Typically, a research proposal should include four sections: introduction/purpose, review of relevant research, method, and implications. You may also want to include additional sections with materials that provide concrete

support for your proposal—some of the tools that will help you get the job done. You should arrange your plan and use headings so that readers can find information quickly.

### ■ Describe Your Purpose

In the introduction, you should describe the purpose of your study and establish that the issue you want to study is relevant and timely. Then, briefly summarize how others have treated the issue you are focusing on in order to explain whether you are trying to fill a gap, correct a misconception, build upon and extend others' research, or test a hypothesis. As we point out throughout this book, it is important to help readers understand the context by retracing the conversation. After you provide some context to help readers understand the purpose of your study, you should then formulate the question that is motivating your research.

Finally, you should explain why you are interested in this issue, why it is important, and what is at stake. Ask yourself why others should be interested in your effort to answer the question.

### ■ Review Relevant Research

Following the introduction, you should provide a review of the relevant research. For a proposal, you should demonstrate that you have a firm grasp of the issue as part of the argument you are making to justify your study. The more effectively you convince readers that you know the issue, the more persuasive your argument. Therefore, you will want to show that you have read widely, that you are aware of the most important studies conducted in your area of research, that you are also aware of current research within the past five years, and that you understand the strengths and limitations of your own approach.

More specifically, you can use your review to accomplish some of the following:

- Define a key term that is central to your study that others may not necessarily agree upon.
- Discuss the history relevant to your research.
- Explain the strengths and limitations of different methodological approaches to answering similar research questions.
- Analyze the different theoretical approaches that authors have used to frame the issue (e.g., psychological, sociological, socioeconomic, racial).
- Identify trends in what researchers are finding or, perhaps, the lack of agreement.
- Point to more comprehensive reviews of research that others have written.

### ■ Define Your Method

In your method section, you should first explain how you will answer the research question motivating your study using the tools that are available. Some of the tools and strategies you might use include the following:

- conducting interviews or focus groups;
- taking notes;
- recording particular activities;
- doing background, historical, or archival work, and
- observing or coming to terms with your own impressions.

Since this is a proposal for research you will conduct, you should write this section in the future tense. “To answer the question(s) motivating this study, I will conduct interviews and focus groups and take detailed notes. . . .”

Second, describe how you plan to collect your data. Tell readers whether you will audio-record and transcribe interviews and/or focus groups. If you are taking notes, you will want to explain whether you plan to take notes during or after the session. Be sure to explain where you are conducting the interview or focus group. If you are observing classes, meetings, or some event, you will need to explain how often you will observe, for how long, and whether you will be taking notes or transcribing data.

Third, justify why you are using some methods of collecting data and not others. Discuss the appropriateness of these methods given your research question. Given the objectives you have set for yourself and the constraints of doing the research, are some methods better than others? How will the methods you have chosen to use enable you to answer your question(s)?

Finally, you should have some sense of how you will analyze the data you collect. That is, readers will expect that you have done more than simply read your transcripts from interviews and focus groups to form impressions. Therefore, you will want to explain the principles you will use to analyze the data in light of the research question(s) you are asking.

### ■ Discuss Your Implications

It may seem a little premature to talk about what you hope to find in your study, but it is important to address “So what?” to explain what you believe is the significance of your study. Place your argument in

the context of the conversation you want to join, and explain how your study will build upon, challenge, or extend the studies in your area of research. And finally, identify what you believe will be new about your findings.

### ■ Include Additional Materials That Support Your Research

Depending on your instructor and the level of formality of your proposal, you may be asked to include additional materials that reveal other dimensions of your research. Those materials may include (1) an annotated bibliography, (2) scripts of the questions you plan to ask in interviews and focus groups, (3) the consent forms you will ask participants to sign, and (4) approval from your university's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

**Annotated bibliography.** An **annotated bibliography** is a list of sources (arranged alphabetically by author) that you plan to consult and use in your research paper. Typically you provide a citation (author, date, title of source, and publication information) and a short summary of the source. You can present all your sources in one long list or organize them by type of source (books, journals, and so forth). See pages 184–86 in Chapter 7 for a more complete description of how to write an annotated bibliography and an example.

**Questions you plan to ask.** Including a list (or lists) of the questions you expect to ask those you plan to interview or survey will help focus your thinking. What personal information do you need to know? What information do you need to know about your issue? What opinions and recommendations would be helpful? Each list should include at least five good questions but can include many more. A sample set of questions, focusing on parents of homeless children, appears in Figure 13.1.

**Consent forms.** Whenever you plan to solicit information in an interview or focus group, you need to get permission from the interviewees or participants to use their comments and contributions in your research paper. The Institutional Review Board on your campus probably has a model for writing a consent form that you can use, but we have included a sample consent form for an interview in Figure 13.2.

**IRB approval.** Your school's Institutional Review Board ensures that researchers hold high ethical standards in the research they conduct and protect the rights of "human subjects" who participate in a study. It is

possible that research conducted for a class will not require IRB approval. You should contact the appropriate office (for example, the Office for Research) on your campus for details and exceptions.

### Sample Interview Questions

#### Parent(s)

1. a. Describe your current living and family situation (parents, siblings, how long homeless, where living, where child attends school).  
b. Describe your child.  
c. Describe your relationship with your child.
2. a. Do you think homelessness is affecting your child's schooling?  
b. If so, tell me how (grades, friends, attendance, transportation).
3. Tell me about enrolling your child in school. What was the process like? Were there any problems? Conditions? Challenges?
4. a. Do you feel that your child's right to an education has been recognized?  
b. Why or why not? Describe any experiences that support your answer.
5. Describe the relationship between your child and his or her teachers.
6. a. What types of support services is your child currently being offered in school and in the community?  
b. How effective are those services?  
c. How supportive of your child's educational and developmental growth do you feel your child's school has been?  
d. What about the Center for the Homeless?  
e. Do you have any recommendations for these sources of help or requests for other types of services for your child that are not currently offered?
7. How do you envision your child's future?

**FIGURE 13.1** Sample Interview Questions

### ■ Establish a Timeline

Draw up a schedule for your research and identify when you expect to complete specific tasks. For example, when will you do the following?

- Submit proposal to Institutional Review Board (if necessary).
- Contact participants and get their commitments.
- Conduct interviews, focus groups, and the like.
- Compile an annotated bibliography.
- Transcribe the data.

### Sample Interview Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study of homelessness and education conducted by Mary Ronan, an undergraduate at the University of Notre Dame, during the next few months. If you decide to participate, you will

1. provide up to two interviews with the researcher
2. allow the researcher to use excerpts from the interviews in publications about research with the understanding that your identity will not be revealed at any time.

Participation is completely voluntary. You may choose to stop participating at any time prior to completion of the project. Should you have any questions at any time, you are welcome to contact the researcher by phone or e-mail. Your decision to participate will have no effect on or prejudice your future relationship with the University of Notre Dame. One possible benefit of participating in the study is that you will have the opportunity to learn about the implications of homelessness on education.

If you are willing to participate in this research, please read and sign the consent form below. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

#### CONSENT FORM

*I agree to participate in all of the procedures above. I understand that my identity will be protected during the study and that others will not have access to the interviews I provide. I also understand that my name will not be revealed when data from the research are presented in publications. I have read the above and give the researcher, Mary Ronan, permission to use excerpts from transcripts of tapes without identifying me as the writer or speaker.*

Date	Signature
[Telephone number]	
[E-mail address]	Signature of Researcher

**FIGURE 13.2** Sample Interview Consent Form

- Analyze the data.
- Draft an introduction, methods, and findings.

Your timeline should include the dates when you expect to finish the proposal, when you will conduct interviews and focus groups, when you expect to have a draft, and when you will complete the project. Be realistic about how long it will actually take to complete the different stages of collecting data and writing. Anticipate that events may prevent things from going exactly as planned. People cannot always meet with you when you would like them to, and you may have to change your own schedule. Therefore, be sure to contact participants well in advance of the time when you would like to speak with them in interviews or focus groups.

that a more compelling project would be less Barbie-centric. Instead, she chose to examine the broader phenomenon of how the idea of femininity is created and reinforced by society. That is, her personal interest in Barbie was supplanted by her discoveries about cultural norms of beauty and the power they have to influence self-perception and behavior. In her final draft, this was her definitive thesis:

Although evidence may be provided to argue that gender is an innate characteristic, I will show that it is actually the result of one's actions, which are then labeled *masculine* or *feminine* according to society's definitions of ideal gender. Furthermore, I will discuss the communication of such definitions through the media, specifically in music videos, on TV, and in magazines, and the harmful implications of being exposed to these ideals.

Instead of arguing for change, the student chose to show her readers how they were being manipulated, leaving it to them to decide what actions they might want to take.

## DEVELOPING A WORKING THESIS: FOUR MODELS

What are some ways to develop a working thesis? We suggest four models that may help you organize the information you gather in response to the question guiding your inquiry.

### ■ The Correcting-Misinterpretations Model

This model is used to correct writers whose arguments you believe have misconstrued one or more important aspects of an issue. The thesis typically takes the form of a factual claim. Consider this example and the words we have underlined:

Although scholars have addressed curriculum to explain low achievement in schools, they have failed to fully appreciate the impact of limited resources to fund up-to-date textbooks, quality teachers, and computers. Therefore, reform in schools must focus on economic need as well as curriculum.

The clause beginning with "Although" lays out the assumption that many scholars make, that curriculum explains low educational achievement; the clause beginning with "they have failed" identifies the error those scholars have made by ignoring the economic reasons for low achievement in schools. Notice that the structure of the sentence reinforces the author's position. He explains what he sees as the faulty assumption in a subordinate clause and reserves the main clause for his own position. The two clauses indicate that different authors hold conflicting opinions. Note that the writer could have used a phrase such as "they [scholars] have *understated* the impact of limited resources" as a way to reframe