

Inspect a book's *table of contents* to find topics of interest. A typical history book might display these headings in the table of contents:

The French Revolution  
The Era of Napoleon  
Reaction to Napoleon and More Revolutions  
The Second Empire of France

If any of these headings look interesting, go to the book's *index* for additional headings, such as this sample:

Napoleon  
becomes Emperor, 174-176  
becomes First Consul, 173  
becomes Life Consul, 174  
and the Catholic Church, 176-178  
character of, 168-176  
and codes of law, 178-179  
defeats Austrians, 170  
extends empire in Europe, 180-189  
encounters opposition, 190-191  
defeated by enemies, 192-197  
sent to Elba, 197  
seizes power for "One Hundred Days," 198  
sent to St. Helena, 199

If you see something that looks interesting, read the designated pages to consider the topic further. For example, you might read about Napoleon's return from Elba for a few additional days of glory before the darkness of confinement at St. Helena.

### Searching the Headings in the Printed Indexes

If you do not have access to an electronic database, the printed indexes categorize and subdivide topics by alphabetical order. These are works such as the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, *Bibliographic Index*, or *Humanities Index*. Searching under a key word or phrase will usually locate a list of critical articles on the subject, and studying the titles might suggest a narrowed topic. For example, looking under the heading *Single Mothers* might produce several possible topics, such as "welfare moms," "single motherhood," or "racial differentials in child support."

**HINT:** Topic selection goes beyond choosing a general category (e.g., "single mothers"). It includes finding a research-provoking issue or question, such as "The foster parent program seems to have replaced the orphanage system. Has it been effective?" That is, you need to take a stand, adopt a belief, or begin asking questions. For more information, see 2h.

## 2h Drafting a Research Proposal

A research proposal comes in two forms: (1) a short paragraph to identify the project for yourself and your instructor or (2) a formal, multipage report that provides background information, your rationale for conducting the study, a review of the literature, your methods, and the conclusions you hope to prove.

### The Short Proposal

A short proposal identifies five essential ingredients of your work:

- The specific topic.
- The purpose of the paper (explain, analyze, argue).
- The intended audience (general or specialized).
- Your voice as the writer (informer or advocate).
- The preliminary thesis sentence or opening hypothesis.

For example, here is the proposal of Gena Messersmith (see her paper on pages 300–09):

This report will deal with the issues facing parents who have children who are diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). I'm one of those parents, so this study touches my life. In it, I will try to determine if medication is the best treatment for this disorder. Respected authorities in the field state over and over again that medication is the only known solution to the treatment of this disorder. Even with experts backing medication, there is still resistance to medicating children. To support my claim, I have planned for interviews with people who either have ADHD or have children with ADHD.

This writer has identified the basic nature of her project and can now go in search of evidence that will defend the argument.

### The Long Proposal

Some instructors may assign the long proposal, which may include some or all of the following elements:

1. *Cover page* with title of the project, your name, and the person or agency to whom you are submitting the proposal:

The Dangers of Internet Addiction  
Submitted to  
The University Committee on Computers  
By Tiffany Bledsoe

2. An *abstract* that summarizes your project in fifty to one hundred words (see p. 211 for an example).

3. A *purpose statement* with your *rationale* for the project. In essence this is your thesis sentence, your identification of the audience that your work will address, and the role you will play as investigator and advocate (see the short proposal above for an example and the discussion below, "Explaining Your Purpose in the Research Proposal").

4. A *statement of qualification* that explains your experience and perhaps the special qualities you bring to the project; Gena Messersmith, for example, says in her short proposal above, "I'm one of those parents, so this study touches my life." Another student made this qualification:

I bring first-hand experience to this study. I used to drink the water from our farm's well, but now the water is contaminated. My parents and I do not dare drink it. This project will examine the damage to the environment by chemicals seeping into the ground from several different sources. It will serve as a warning to all landowners that industrial pollution seeps many miles from the source.

If you have no experience with the subject, you can omit the statement of qualification.

5. A *review of the literature*, which will survey the articles and books that you have examined in your preliminary work (see pages 120–22 for an explanation with an example).

6. A description of your *research methods*, which is the design of the *materials* you will need, your *timetable*, and, where applicable, your *budget*. These elements are often a part of a scientific study, so see Chapters 15 and 17 for work in the social, physical, and biological sciences.

## Explaining Your Purpose in the Research Proposal

Research papers accomplish different tasks:

- They explain and define the topic.
- They analyze the specific issues.
- They persuade the reader with the weight of the evidence.

Use *explanation* to review and itemize factual data. One writer explained how diabetes can be managed (see Sarah Bemis's essay on pages 344–51). Another writer explained how organ donation has lagged far behind the demand for tissue and organs (see Adele Gelvin's essay on pages 323–35).

Use *analysis* to classify various parts of the subject and to investigate each one in depth. One writer examined various foods that might be instrumental in preventing certain diseases. The analysis required her to classify and itemize the foods and give a breakdown of their various benefits.

Use *persuasion* to question the general attitudes about a problem and then to affirm new theories, advance a solution, recommend a course of

## C H E C K L I S T

### Addressing the Reader

- *Identify your audience.* Have you visualized your audience, its expertise, and its expectations? Your perception of the reader will affect your voice, style, and your choice of words.
- *Identify your discipline.* Readers in each discipline will bring differing expectations to your paper with regard to content, language, design, and documentation format.
- *Meet the needs of your readers.* Are you saying something worthwhile? Something new? Do not bore them with known facts from an encyclopedia. (This latter danger is the reason many instructors discourage your use of an encyclopedia as a source.)
- *Engage and even challenge your readers.* Find an interesting or different point of view. For example, a report on farm life can become a challenging examination of chemical contamination because of industrial sprawl into rural areas, and an interpretation of a novel can become an examination of the prison system rather than a routine discourse on theme or characterization.

action, or—in the least—invite the reader into an intellectual dialogue. Katie Hebert urges the reader to eat wisely (210–23), Gena Messersmith encourages the use of medication for children diagnosed with ADHD (300–09), and Adele Gelvin encourages us to sign our donor cards (323–35).

### Identifying Your Audience in the Research Proposal

Academic readers will have certain expectations, based upon the focus of your work, so adjust your topic and critical approach to the people who will read your paper. Readers of a paper on social issues (i.e., working mothers, latchkey children, overcrowded prisons) will expect analysis that points toward a *social theory* or answer. Readers of an academic interpretation of a novel will expect to read *literary theories* on the novel's symbolism, narrative structure, or characterization. Readers of a business report on outdoor advertising will expect *statistical evidence* that will defend a general proposition, especially as it reflects the demographics of the targeted consumers and the cost of reaching them.

### Identifying Your Role as a Researcher in the Proposal

Your voice should reflect the investigative nature of your work, so try to display your knowledge. In short, make it *your* discourse, not a collection of quotations from experts in the books and journals. Your role as a researcher is to investigate, explain, argue the issues at hand, and defend your ideas with proper

citations. Refer often to your authorities and quote them, but not lavishly; that is, quote a key, pivotal sentence, not an entire paragraph. Provide charts or graphs that you have created or copied from the sources. Just be certain that you provide in-text citations to the sources to reflect your academic honesty.

## 2i Expressing Your Thesis

A thesis sentence expands your topic into a scholarly proposal, one that you will try to prove and defend in your paper. It does not state the obvious, such as: "Langston Hughes was a great poet from Harlem." That sentence will not provoke an academic discussion because your readers know that any published poet has talent. The writer must narrow and isolate one issue by finding a critical focus, such as this one that a student considered for her essay:

Langston Hughes used a controversial vernacular language that paved the way for later artists, even today's rap musicians.

This sentence advances an idea that the writer can develop fully and defend with evidence. The writer has made a connection between the subject, *Langston Hughes*, and the focusing agent, *vernacular language*. Look at two other writers' thesis statements:

**THESIS:** Certain nutritional foods can prevent disease.

**THESIS:** More people must become organ donors despite their initial resistance.

In the first, the writer begins a causal analysis on the effects of selected foods. In the second, the writer advances a proposal on a medical issue as well as a moral one. Accordingly, each writer's critical approach to a subject affects the thesis.

Depending on the critical approach, one topic might produce several issues from which the writer might pick:

- BIOLOGICAL APPROACH:** Nutritional foods may be a promising addition to the diet of those who wish to avoid certain diseases.
- ECONOMIC APPROACH:** Nutritional foods can become an economic weapon in the battle against rising health care costs.
- HISTORIC APPROACH:** Other civilizations, including primitive tribes, have known about food's healing properties for centuries. Why did we let modern chemistry blind us to its benefits?

Each statement above will provoke a response from the reader, who will demand a carefully structured defense in the body of the paper.

Your thesis is not your conclusion or your answer to a problem. Rather, the thesis anticipates your conclusion by setting in motion the examination of facts and pointing the reader toward the special idea of your paper, which

you will save for the conclusion. Note below how three writers developed different thesis sentences even though they had the same topic, "Santiago in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*." (Hemingway's novel narrates the toils of an old Cuban fisherman named Santiago, who desperately needs the money to be gained by returning with a good catch of fish. On this day he catches a marlin. After a long struggle, Santiago ties the huge marlin to the side of his small boat. However, during the return in the darkness, sharks attack the marlin so that he arrives home with only a skeleton of the fish. He removes the boat's mast and carries it, like a cross, up the hill to his home.)

**Thesis:** Poverty forced Santiago to venture too far and struggle beyond reason in his attempt to land the marlin.

This writer will examine the economic conditions of Santiago's trade.

**Thesis:** The giant marlin is a symbol for all of life's obstacles and hurdles, and Santiago is a symbol for all suffering humans.

This writer will examine the religious and social symbolism of the novel.

**Thesis:** Hemingway's portrayal of Santiago demonstrates the author's deep respect for Cuba and its stoic heroes.

This writer takes a social approach in order to examine the Cuban culture and its influence on Hemingway.

Make the preliminary thesis sentence a part of your research proposal:

This paper will interpret a novel, *The Old Man and the Sea*, by Ernest Hemingway. My purpose is to explain to fellow literature students the novel's setting and the social conditions of the old Cuban. I suspect that poverty forced Santiago to venture too far and struggle beyond reason in his attempt to land the marlin. —Ramon Lopez

This writer and his instructor now have an understanding of the paper's purpose, its audience, the role of the student as a literary interpreter, and the paper's narrow focus on Santiago's economic status.

## Using an Enthymeme

Some of your instructors might want the research paper to develop an argument as expressed in an enthymeme, which is a claim supported with a *because* clause. Examples:

**ENTHYME:** Hyperactive children need medication because ADHD is a medical disorder, not a behavioral problem.

The claim that children need medication is supported by the stated reason that the condition is a medical problem, not one of behavior. This writer will

need to address any unstated assumptions, for example, that medication alone will solve the problem.

**ENTHYME:** Health-conscious Americans should eat functional foods because they protect against cancer and heart problems.

The claim that food can protect one's health is supported by the stated reason that some foods protect human organs against disease. Again, this writer will need to address any unstated assumptions, for example, that diet alone can produce good health.

## YOUR RESEARCH PROJECT

1. Make a list of your personal interests and items that affect your mental and physical activities, such as roommates, hiking, or relations with your family. Examine each one to see if you can find an academic angle that will make the topic fit the context of your research assignment. See 2a pages 11-16, for more help.