

17 Proposals

Contractors bid on building projects. Musicians and educators apply for grants. Researchers seek funding. Student leaders call for lights on bike paths. You offer to pay half the cost of a car and insurance if your parents will pay the other half. Lovers propose marriage; friends propose sharing dinner and a movie. These are all examples of proposals: ideas put forward for consideration that say, "Here is a solution to a problem" or "This is what ought to be done." All proposals are arguments: when you propose something, you are trying to persuade others to see a problem in a particular way and to accept your solution to the problem. For example, here is a proposal for reducing the costs of higher education, from a lengthy report prepared in 2004 by the Colorado student chapter of the Higher Education Project of the State Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs). PIRGs are non-partisan, non-profit advocacy groups; this one focuses on increasing aid for college students.

TRACEY KING AND ELLYNNE BANNON

The Burden of Borrowing: A Proposal for Reducing Student Debt

Higher education is critical to the future success of Americans. In addition to the inherent benefits of a higher education, a college degree is worth 75 percent more than a high school diploma, or more than \$1,000,000 over a lifetime in the workforce. However, as college costs continue to swell, students are increasingly shouldering high levels of debt to pay for a college education.

Thirty-nine percent of student borrowers now graduate with unmanageable levels of debt, meaning that their monthly payments are more than 8 percent of their monthly income. According to new

data from the Department of Education's National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), not only are the majority of students turning to loans to finance college, but debt levels are also escalating. In 1999–2000, 64 percent of students graduated with student-loan debt, and the average student-loan debt has nearly doubled over the past eight years, to \$16,928.

There are several possible explanations for increases in student borrowing. First [according to a 2001 report of the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance], the strength of the Pell grant has declined from covering 84 percent of tuition at a four-year public institution in 1975–76 to 39 percent today. While Congress has increased funding in recent years, the Pell grant maximum has not been able to keep up with inflation and rising tuition costs. As a result, low-income students are forced to borrow to cover that unmet need. Second, wealthy families may be shifting more of the cost of college from savings to student loans. Also, as tuition increases faster than inflation and median income, students overall are facing increasing levels of need.

We need to look for solutions that make college more affordable and protect students from unmanageable debt burden. Congress should increase grant-aid funding, reduce the cost of student loans, and provide flexibility within the student loan program to help make college more affordable for all Americans. . . .

Increase grant-aid funding: Federal need-based grant aid provides low-income students with access to a higher education. Without this aid, many low-income students take on unmanageable levels of debt burden or forgo a college education altogether. Recent increases in Pell grant funding may have kept some low-income students from borrowing and slowed the growth of debt levels among those who did borrow. Congress should increase need-based grant funding and, specifically, fully fund the Pell grant program.

Lower the cost of borrowing to students: With the typical senior graduating with \$16,928 in federal loan debt, Congress should take the following steps to reduce the cost of borrowing:

- Congress should maintain low interest rates on student loans.
- Congress should pass the Affordable Student Loan Act (H.R. 1622), which would eliminate origination and insurance fees on student loans and save the typical student \$677. These savings could be used to pay for tuition, books, and other living expenses.



- Congress should pass a tax credit of up to \$1,500 for interest paid on student loans, which would help reduce the burden of debt after graduation.

Continue to provide flexible repayment options to borrowers: Congress should continue to provide flexibility within the student-loan program to help make college more affordable for all Americans. Repayment options such as deferment, loan forgiveness, forbearance, and income-contingent repayment help students who are facing unmanageable debt repay their loans without going into default.

Maintain current loan limits: Congress should not increase loan limits without reducing the current cost of borrowing. Raising loan limits will not solve the access problem. Instead, it will only make the situation worse, with more and more students falling into burdensome debt after college. Congress should continue to work toward increasing access to higher education while protecting students from unmanageable levels of debt.

This proposal clearly defines the problem, offers reasons for the increase in student debt, and proposes a set of actions to deal with the problem. It actually ends with the proposed actions, which function, therefore, as a call to action. Its tone, while forceful, is balanced and reasonable.

Key Features / Proposals

A well-defined problem. Some problems are self-evident or relatively simple, and you would not need much persuasive power to make people act—as with the problem “This university discards too much paper.” While some people might see nothing wrong with throwing paper away, most are likely to agree that recycling is a good thing. Other issues are controversial: some people see them as problems while others do not, such as this one: “Motorcycle riders who do not wear helmets risk serious injury and raise health-care costs for everyone.” Some motorcyclists believe that wearing or not wearing a helmet is a personal choice; you would have to present arguments to convince your readers that not wearing a helmet is indeed a problem needing a solution. Any written proposal must establish at the outset that there is a problem—and that it’s serious enough to require a solution.

■ rhetorical situations

▲ genres

○ processes

◆ strategies

● research
mia/apa

□ media/
design



A recommended solution. Once you have defined the problem, you need to describe the solution you are suggesting and to explain it in enough detail for readers to understand what you are proposing. Sometimes, as in the student-debt proposal in this chapter, you might suggest several solutions.

A convincing argument for your proposed solution. You need to convince readers that your solution is feasible—and that it is the best way to solve the problem. Sometimes you’ll want to explain in detail the steps needed to enact a proposal. See, for example, how the student-loan proposal details how Congress could lower the cost of borrowing.

Anticipate questions. You may need to consider any questions readers may have about your proposal—and to show how its advantages outweigh any disadvantages. Had the student-loan proposal been written for a Congressional budget committee, it would have needed to anticipate and answer questions about the costs of the proposed solution.

A call to action. The goal of a proposal is to persuade readers to accept your proposed solution. This solution may include asking readers to take action.

An appropriate tone. Since you’re trying to persuade readers to act, your tone is important—readers will always react better to a reasonable, respectful presentation than to anger or self-righteousness.

A BRIEF GUIDE TO WRITING

Deciding on a Topic

Choose a problem that can be solved. When you are assigned to write a proposal for a writing class, you will need to choose a problem to write about. Complex, large problems, such as poverty, hunger, or terrorism, usually require complex, large solutions. Most of the time, focusing on a smaller problem or a limited aspect of a large problem will yield a more manageable proposal. Rather than tackling the problem of world poverty,



for example, think about the problem faced by families in your community that have lost jobs and need help until they find employment.

Considering the Rhetorical Situation

3-4

■ **PURPOSE** Do you have a vested interest in the solution your readers adopt, or do you simply want to eliminate the problem, whatever solution might be adopted?

5-8

■ **AUDIENCE** How can you reach your readers? Do you know how receptive or resistant to change they are likely to be? Do they have the authority to enact your proposal?

12-14

■ **STANCE** How can you show your audience that your proposal is reasonable and should be taken seriously? How can you demonstrate your own authority and credibility?

15-17

■ **MEDIA / DESIGN** How will you deliver your proposal? In print? Online? As a speech? Would visuals help you to argue for your proposal?

Generating Ideas and Text

Explore potential solutions to the problem. Many problems can be solved in more than one way, and you need to show your readers that you've examined several potential solutions. You may develop solutions to your problem on your own; more often, though, you'll need to do **RESEARCH** to see how others have solved—or tried to solve—similar problems. Don't settle on a single solution too quickly—you'll need to **COMPARE** the advantages and disadvantages of several solutions in order to argue convincingly for one.

329-449 ●

266-74 ◆

Decide on the most desirable solution(s). One solution may be head and shoulders above others—but be open to rejecting all the possible solutions on your list and starting over if you need to, or to combining two or more potential solutions in order to come up with an acceptable fix.

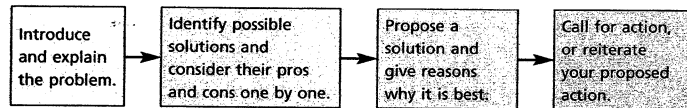


Think about why your solution is the best one. Why did you choose your solution? Why will it work better than others? What has to be done to enact it? What will it cost? What makes you think it can be done? Writing out answers to these questions will help you argue for your solution—to show that you have carefully and objectively outlined a problem, analyzed the potential solutions, and weighed their merits—and to show the reasons the solution you propose is the best.

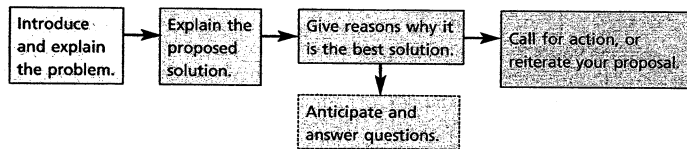
Ways of Organizing a Proposal

You can organize a proposal in various ways, but always you will begin by establishing that there is a problem. You may then consider several solutions before recommending one particular solution. Sometimes, however, you might suggest only a single solution.

[Several possible solutions]



[A single solution]



If You Need More Help

See Chapter 23 for guidelines on **DRAFTING**, Chapter 24 on **ASSESSING YOUR DRAFT**, Chapter 25 on **GETTING RESPONSE AND REVISING**, and Chapter 26 on **EDITING AND PROOFREADING**. See Chapter 27 if you are required to submit your proposal in a writing **PORTFOLIO**.



TOPIC PROPOSALS

Instructors often ask students to write topic proposals to ensure that their topics are appropriate or manageable. If you get your instructor's response to a good proposal before you write it, your finished product will likely be much better than if you try to guess the assignment's demands. Some instructors may also ask for an **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY** showing that appropriate sources of information are available—more evidence that the project can be carried out. Here a first-year student proposes a topic for an assignment in a writing course in which she has been asked to take a position on a global issue.

112-19 ▲

JENNIFER CHURCH

Biodiversity Loss and Its Effect on Medicine

The loss of biodiversity—the variety of organisms found in the world—is affecting the world every day. Some scientists estimate that we are losing approximately one hundred species per day and that more than a quarter of all species may vanish within fifty years. I recently had the issue of biodiversity loss brought to my attention in a biological sciences course that I am taking this quarter. I have found myself interested in and intrigued by the subject and have found an abundance of information both in books and on the Internet.

In this paper, I will argue that it is crucial for people to stop this rapid loss of our world's biodiversity. Humans are the number-one cause of biodiversity loss in the world. Whether through pollution or toxins, we play a crucial role in the extinction of many different species. For example, 80 percent of the world's medicine comes from biological species and their habitats. One medicine vanishing due to biodiversity loss is TAXOL. Found in the Wollemi pine tree, TAXOL is one of the most promising drugs for the treatment of ovarian and breast cancer. If the Wollemi pine tree becomes extinct, we will lose this potential cure.

I will concentrate primarily on biodiversity and its effects on the medical field. If we keep destroying the earth's biodiversity at the cur-

rent rate, we may lose many opportunities to develop medicines we need to survive. The majority of my information will be found on the Internet, because there are many reliable Web sites from all around the world that address the issue of biodiversity loss and medicine.

Church defines and narrows her topic (from biodiversity loss to the impact of that loss on medicine), discusses her interest, outlines her argument, and discusses her research strategy. Her goal is to convince her instructor that she has a realistic writing project and a clear plan.

Key Features / Topic Proposals

You'll need to explain what you want to write about, why you want to explore it, and what you'll do with your topic. Unless your instructor has additional requirements, here are the features to include:

A concise discussion of the subject. Topic proposals generally open with a brief discussion of the subject, outlining any important areas of controversy or debate associated with it and clarifying the extent of the writer's current knowledge of it. In its first two paragraphs, Church's proposal includes a concise statement of the topic she wishes to address.

A clear statement of your intended focus. State what aspect of the topic you intend to write on as clearly as you can, narrowing your focus appropriately. Church does so by stating her intended topic—loss of biodiversity—and then showing how she will focus on the importance of biodiversity to the medical field.

A rationale for choosing the topic. Tell your instructor why this topic interests you and why you want to write about it. Church both states what made her interested in her topic and hints at a practical reason for choosing it: plenty of information is available.

Mention of resources. To show your instructor that you can achieve your goal, you need to identify the available research materials.

