

What Is a Topic Proposal?

Imagine for a moment that a group of college students want to form a club or an organization or suppose that the students in a business law class want their college to fund the travel costs for an educational field trip to witness a trial in a nearby town. These are reasonable requests, aren't they, but how would these students accomplish their tasks? Could they simply telephone the appropriate college authorities and ask permission? Or would these students have to put their requests in writing? Which request would campus administrators be most likely to honor, a verbal request or a written request? We all know the answer, don't we? I think we do. Writing makes things happen, and proposal writing is a skill now required of most professionals.

To propose means to put something forward for consideration—a question, an idea, a plan. In fact, however, educated professionals—librarians, small business owners, nurses, medical doctors, lawyers, teachers, wildlife biologists, police officers—most often make their most serious proposals to other professionals in writing. They do so in order to secure funding for their projects, alter rules and regulations, increase profit margins, experiment with new procedures, conduct surveys and tests, and generally perform their duties as professionals. Writing proposals is simply part of their jobs.

A topic proposal is, of course, something more than a proposition: it's a writer's detailed suggestion and plan for writing an essay or an article on a particular subject. Of course, we must remember that a topic proposal is itself a kind of essay. Its purpose is to convince your professor and your peers that you have found a topic that genuinely interests you. You also need to show us that you have done enough pre-writing and conducted enough preliminary research to narrow your topic into focus and that you have

a plan and purpose for writing to a particular audience. Your general tone should be enthusiastic and confident.

A topic proposal, of course, can utilize any mode of organization including narrative, description, definition, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, problem and solution, and classification. In fact, a good proposal usually employs several modes of expression. It might open with an anecdote, move to a definition, and close with a comparison and a description. In addition, a good proposal will almost always identify your thesis question (or series of questions) and state your credentials and qualifications for writing. It will almost certainly make good use of one or two direct quotations. Such a proposal will require you to write a preliminary draft and to submit it for peer comment and review before revising it into a final draft.