

English 092 Unit 6.1

Preparing a Research Proposal/Outline

Your research paper is your biggest and most intensive assignment. Read this Unit several times so that you understand what is expected from you.

Your persuasive research paper should be completed in two stages.

Stage 1 is preparing the Research Proposal/Outline. We'll usually just refer to it as the proposal. In Unit 6 you will be

- a) choosing a topic,
- b) doing some preliminary reading, and
- c) preparing the proposal.

Stage 2 is writing the persuasive research paper itself. This happens after your instructor approves your proposal, and after you have done your preliminary research. In Unit 7 you will learn more about how to write the actual research paper. The reason this doesn't happen in Unit 6 is because preparing the proposal and the subsequent approval of your proposal by your instructor takes some time - finding research materials also takes a fair bit of time. **Summary writing**, which you practiced in Unit 5, is an important skill that you will apply in writing your research paper.

You will be adjusting and working on your proposal plus doing research for quite a while. It's critical that you think things through now, to ensure that you have a good, workable plan and outline in place before you start writing your paper.

Your research paper should be about 1000 words long, so you will need enough material to support your ideas in about four double-spaced pages, but not so much that you don't know what to do with all of it.

Please **DO NOT** write a research paper on the following topics because it is very difficult to find something new to say on these subjects:

1. **Legalization/decriminalization of marijuana**
2. **Abortion**
3. **Same sex marriages**
4. **Euthanasia/assisted suicide**
5. **Capital punishment**
6. **The topics in the examples below**

Grading: Your proposal/outline + your research paper are worth 25% of your course mark: 5% for the proposal and 20% for the research paper.

Steps to Prepare Your Proposal

Read Chapter 18 (**Ch. 11 in 5th Edition**) in your text on Researching Your Subject.

This will give you a better sense of the purpose and the scope of a research essay.

You first must choose a general area of interest, and then narrow it down to a specific topic in that area. See the steps below the table.

The process of writing a research paper involves

- 1) choosing a general subject area,
- 2) narrowing your ideas to a specific topic,
- 3) developing a research question, and
- 4) deciding upon a working or tentative thesis.

The table below shows these steps used in examples (taken from student research papers). The idea is to move from a general subject area to a clear thesis statement. Please do not use any of the subjects below as your topic.

1. Subject Area	Salmon Farming	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	Biotechnology and Agriculture
2. Specific Topic	The environmental versus the economic impacts of salmon farming	The prescribing of Ritalin to control ADHD in children	Corporate versus consumer interest in the development of biotech foods
3. Research Question	Is salmon farming an economically and environmentally viable industry?	What are the results of the widespread use of Ritalin to control ADHD in children?	What dangers do foods produced through biotechnology present to the consumer?
4. Working or Tentative Thesis (so-called because your thesis may change as you learn more about your subject)	The expansion of salmon farming should be strictly controlled because of the serious environmental risks it presents OR Salmon farming presents an economically and environmentally sound solution to economic development in isolated communities.	The over-prescribing of Ritalin to treat ADHD is creating more problems than it is solving OR Ritalin is an effective and relatively safe way to treat ADHD.	Corporations are applying biotechnology to food production without concern for the safety of consumers. OR The benefits of using biotechnology to develop and grow food far outweigh the risks to human health and the environment.

Step 1 - Choose a General Subject Area for Research

Your research paper can be written on a topic of your choice, but make it a topic you are genuinely interested in, not just one that you think will be easy to write about. Be sure that your topic is researchable. If it is common knowledge (smoking is bad for your health), or if it is a matter of opinion (dogs make better pets than cats), then it's not worth writing about. There should be two sides to the subject. This is a Persuasive Research Paper **and** your intent is to prove one side of a controversy by providing the reader with *facts that support your argument.*

Step 2 - Narrow Your Ideas to a Specific Topic

Use your general subject area as a basis for teasing out the issues related to the subject. Brainstorm it, take notes about it, and/or discuss it until you think you have a couple of essential ideas related to the topic. What are some of the controversies related to the subject? What are the most important things people need to know about the subject? What are the choices that people have regarding the subject? Write these down in a single sentence, if possible.

Step 3 Develop Your Research Question

When you create the research question, reword your topic statement so that it reads like a question. Have a look at row #3 in the table above. You must create a research question that indicates that there are two sides to the issue, or two choices that can be made. In your research paper, you will mention both, but you will argue in favour of only one.

Step 4 Write Your Working Thesis Statement

Your thesis is actually the answer to your research question, and as you conduct your research you may confirm, modify, or even reject your thesis, based on what you discover about your subject. It's called a working thesis, because it's what you use to start your work, but it may change.

Note that the table above shows how you might reach two different conclusions depending on the evidence you uncover and how you interpret it. Sometimes we think we know what our conclusion will be before we start to study a topic, but we find that we change our minds based on what we learn as we research and learn more about it. Ask most North American 4-

year-olds if there is a Santa Claus, for example, and most will confirm that he exists. Kids that are 10 or 11 have been exposed to information that has dramatically reversed their belief in the bearded elf. In other words, you should be willing to look at evidence that contradicts or even disproves your initial thesis.

The purpose of a persuasive research paper is to present information that supports your thesis. Avoid simply collecting and presenting material about a subject. If you are interested in writing about killer whales, don't simply write about their mating habits, their diet, and their physical features, and so on. A paper like that would be called a report. A report is information about a topic with no specific thesis or conclusion and no argument. Look for an argument that has two sides to it, or a situation where the commonly held belief is false.

As an example, suppose that you want to research the causes of the decline in the killer whale population around Vancouver Island. In your preliminary research, you may find that increased marine traffic, pollution, and the whale watching industry are all contributing to the decline in the numbers of whales in the area. As you research further, however, you might find that the main factor is really pollution and that marine traffic and whale watching are actually minor factors. Or, you may discover other factors that you hadn't initially thought about, such as the negative effects of sonic radar from boats.

Research involves finding out new things about your topic, not just restating what you already know. Your first paragraph should end with a thesis statement that you intend to prove and provide information on. Once you have organized your ideas on killer whales as we have done in the table above, you should have 4 steps that go from general to specific, like this:

1. Subject Area	Killer whales
2. Specific Topic	The decline in the killer whale population
3. Research Question	What is causing the decline of Vancouver Island's killer whale population?
4. Working Thesis	Increased <u>marine traffic</u> , <u>pollution</u> , and the <u>whale watching industry</u> are all contributing to the decline of the killer whale.

You must use and document at least four sources for your information. When using sources from the Internet for your information carefully evaluate the reliability of the sites and sources you are using. Sites with URL's containing .edu or .org are generally more reliable than .com sites.

You may directly access the content of articles and journals by logging into the Camosun Library and using the searchable data base. Click here: <http://camosun.ca/services/library/>

For more help in preparing to write your proposal, refer to the following readings in Essay Essentials.

- **Part 5** The Research Paper - Introduction (257)
- **Chapter 18** Researching Your Subject (259)

(Part 4, 143, and Chapter 11, 147 in 5th Edition)

Then go on to the next part of Unit 6 – Completing the Proposal Assignment Form in Unit 6.2.