

What is a proposal for a research program?

- You obviously have not *done* the research yet (so this is NOT a research report)
- Your task is to convince people to give you money to *do* the research

Why would someone (i.e. the granting agency) give YOU money to do research?

In your case, because they believe that you sound like someone who it is worth investing in.

Who would they find worthwhile investing in?

someone who looks promising (CV...etc.)

someone who sounds like they have an interesting and informed and doable research project

What is a worthwhile research project?

One that is clear

If it's not clearly written, chances are that it is not clear to the applicant.

One that can get done.

Is it a manageable size to get done in the estimated time?

One that is interesting.

But remember that the reviewer can be from a different field, so s/he is very likely to not be up to date about what is interesting in your particular area of study. So you have to tell the reviewer that the project is indeed interesting.

One that is timely (why ask this question now?)

How do I write such a proposal?

"First drafts are for learning what your novel or story is about."

-Bernard Malamud

"The essence of good writing is rewriting."

-William Zinsser

"Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all sentences short, or avoid all detail and treat subjects only in outline, but that every word tell."

-William Strunk

You need to convince people that:

- 1) ...you know what you want to do [the research question]
→ **this should be clear right from the start!**
If it's not clear to you, you won't be able to make it clear.
Try for 1 sentence while you are writing drafts.
Be as precise and concise as possible
- 2) ...you know why you want to do it [contextualization]
Explain the relevant concepts;
Give a crash-course in your particular area of study.
Chose a few key terms. Define them. Use them throughout the proposal.
- 3) ... you know how to approach the question [working hypothesis]
For example, break the question down into smaller questions; order them in a sequence
- 4) .. you know how to get your data [methodology]
explain as precise as possible; state whether this is the 'normal way of getting data in your area; say why you do it this way and not any other way
- 5) ... YOU are the right person to do this research [previous experience]
you received all the necessary training;
you know enough,
you will have access to the data....

Some (random) notes:

- visually structured information (make use of fonts; tables; lists;...) but don't make it look messy (it should in the end look nice and clear)
- clear sections (section headings),
→ makes it easy for the reviewer to find the information relevant for the criteria of evaluation (typically the sections they suggest reflects these criteria)
- white space
- define your terms and use them consistently throughout
- flag new terminology visually (with different font)
- avoid repetition
- if you need to say: before I do this, I will do this.... Then there is something wrong with your structure
- if you use a term before you define it (i.e., if the reader gets confused, you lost her/him, even if you are attempting to clarify the confusion as you go along)
- x`a strong conclusion