University of San Diego

McNAIR SCHOLARS

Proposal Guidelines

Proposals will vary by discipline; follow the format that is standard for your field and that your faculty mentor prefers. There is no official page limit, however, the average submission is three pages. The guidelines that follow are a general overview intended to help you get started with your proposal.

PART I: Introduction

The introduction is a statement of the topic you intend to study or the research you propose. It should include: context of the topic, statement of the problem, the objectives/questions of your study, assumptions, definitions, and answer why your study is significant or important. If your research project is a smaller piece of a larger project, describe your project in the context of the larger project. This section should answer the question: *why* are you conducting this research project?

Specific Aims or Goals

Describe simply and concisely what you intend to accomplish. If your research includes a formal hypothesis, include it in this section. If your project is part of a larger project, be sure to specify the work that you will be accomplishing. This section should answer the question: *what* are you going to do?

PART II: Literature Review

The literature review is written to place your study within the context of existing knowledge and other studies in your discipline. It allows you to point out what is new about your research and gives recognition to other scholars. Ideally, at least five other studies should be discussed in the literature review. You should discuss how these books; articles or pieces of work have contributed to your hypothesis. Please review as many articles as necessary to present a clear context of your work. Do not feel limited by the number five. These articles may also be dispersed throughout the proposal. If this is the case, a bibliography should be included.

PART III: Methodology/Theoretical Framework/Experimental Design

Provide a full description of your general research design, as well as the specific methods, procedures materials, subjects, questionnaires, etc. you intend to utilize.
Describe how you intend to accomplish your aims or test your hypothesis.
Will you need IRB approval? What data are you going to collect and how do you intend to collect it? Describe any control methodologies. A budget may be included but is not required. If you are receiving additional funds from another source, please identify them. This section should answer the question: *how* will you do what you intend to do?

Data Analysis

Describe how you intend to analyze your data. How will you describe the outcomes? What statistical tests do you intend to use and why? Discuss any potential limitations of the proposed project. This section will vary by discipline.

Timetable

Provide a tentative timetable for your project. Your timetable should be ambitious but attainable. In addition to your research you will be attending workshops, GRE preparation meetings, and community building events. This will help you organize your time and keep you on track.

PART IV: BIBLIOGRAPHY (Also known as "Work Cited," "References," or "Literature Cited")

On a separate sheet, list the articles or books that you have cited in your proposal. Generally, this is done in alphabetical order by the last name of the author. Consult with your mentor or discipline librarian for guidance on citation format for you field.

EDITING YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSAL

After you have written your first draft of your proposal, and before you turn it in to the McNair staff and your mentor, check for the following:

1. Make sure your proposal has section heading: Introduction, Methodology, and Bibliography.
2. The quality of the writing in the proposal (and research paper) is important. Check for the following errors:
   a. Are the sentences too long? You can improve your writing immensely by using shorter sentences.
   b. Are the paragraphs too long? This is a common problem that makes it harder to read a paper.
   c. Is any of the writing awkward, vague, or too informal? The best writing is concise, to the point, and without a superfluous word.
   d. Avoid inadvertent plagiarism: have you cited your sources each time you express an idea that is not your own?
   e. Have you utilized the correct style for citing articles or books? Adopt the citation style of the major journals in your field or the one your mentor prefers.