

GROUP REPORT (PROPOSAL)
25% of Final Grade

1. PURPOSE

This unit will teach you to write an effective formal business report proposal.

2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit you will be able to:

- Research, organize, write, format, and document a formal report proposal as a part of a team
- Write an effective executive summary

3. WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT

In the last unit you wrote an informative report. Now you face a more challenging task: to write a report aimed at making a change.

Your major writing assignment for this unit is a formal report of about 15 pages, to include a minimum of 10 pages of illustrated text in addition to a letter or memo of transmittal, correctly formatted and numbered front matter (table of contents, list of illustrations, and executive summary), and citations for your sources. You may include appendices, if necessary. Your sources will be documented in Chicago style.

Topic

Your group will be responsible for identifying a local non-profit organization, discussing a particular problem with its management, and proposing some means to help them solve that problem. Here are some angles to explore about your non-profit:

- How do they raise and distribute money?
- How do they attract and recruit volunteers?
- Who gets their help and what qualifications must a client meet?
- What rules must the organization follow that might alter how they operate?
- What are the major goals and projects of the organization? What are some examples of their work?
- What is the history of the organization?
- Where does the organization operate? What is the size or scale of their operations?
- Are there similar organizations out there? What makes this organization distinct?

Due Dates

Topic proposal memo: Tue., Mar. 24.

Group presentation: Thr., Apr. 23.

Final draft: Tue., May 5, in my office no later than noon.

Required Elements

- Letter of transmittal.
- Title page.
- Table of Contents.
- List of Illustrations.
- Executive Summary.
- Three to five illustrations.
- 10-12 single-spaced pages of body text.
- Effective 1st- and 2nd-level headings.
- Seven or more well-selected sources, properly documented using Chicago style.
- Bibliography.

Your basic organizing principle is the proposal—the movement from a problem to a solution. At the end of this page we will look more closely at how proposals are constructed.

Grading Criteria

I am going to work up and down from a "C." Clean sensible copy with competent presentation of all the components will earn at least a C. You can go up from there for quality content and organization and style. You can go down from a C for failure to complete all the elements effectively.

Note: I will have a high standard for formatting and proofreading; after all you have the entire group invested in the paper, not just one person. You should be able to catch and correct most flaws.

You will not receive an individual grade for this assignment; instead, each report will get a grade and each member of the group will get that grade for this project. However, notice in Syllabus Part One that if a member does not participate in the group project that student will receive an E for the project.

Submitting Your Work

In addition to providing your instructor with a copy of your report for grading purposes, you will enclose one copy of the report in an unsealed, addressed and stamped manila envelope that your instructor will mail to your client. For this formal report a professional appearance is of paramount importance. Thus, your report should be submitted in a plastic report cover.

4. GROUP STRATEGY

For this project you will work in groups of 3-5 persons each. As you chose your groups, here are some things to consider:

- Choose your partners very carefully—you are stuck with them. If they don't do their job, you will have to pick up the slack because it's your grade that's at stake, too. Don't be afraid to say "no" to someone you think will be dead weight—if you don't, you will regret it later.
- As the point above makes clear, you should use caution in your choice of group members; if I had to choose, I'd pick people who have differing strengths. Maybe you know someone who has a good computer skillset, another who is a good researcher, someone who is a good writer, and one who is good at editing and proofreading—a group like this would probably have a nice mix of strengths.
- Keep in touch with your group. Whether or not your group does well will probably have as much to do with organization and orchestration of meetings as with doing the actual work. And the dynamics of each group will be unique—some of you may prefer to meet regularly, while others of you may do almost everything by e-mail. In any event, it's important that you keep each other updated as to your progress. If someone is having difficulties, it's better to find out early while there's still time plan, than to find out at the last minute when the project is due.
- How you organize your responsibilities is up to you; however, groups that appoint a coordinator—someone to keep track of everyone else's progress—generally do better than those that don't.

If you run into group problems, I will be glad to help in any way that I can by giving suggestions and so on. However, what you make of your group is up to you. I will be available for consultation throughout the process, but I will mostly just stay out of the way and let you figure out your own group's dynamics. I am much not interested in meeting with you about any individual work you are doing within the group; use your fellow group members to solve problems.

As will be true of your future employers, I'm not really concerned with how many hours you put in or how many times you meet—I will be evaluating you on the final product. Therefore, I'm giving you a good deal of freedom during this unit. Take advantage of it and show me what you can do when let loose!

Finally, it is probably a good idea to appoint one person near the end of the project to be an editor who will check for consistency in themes and transitions.

Note: I reserve the right to make changes to the make-up of your group as I deem them necessary.

5. THE PROPOSAL

Throughout your career you will frequently be called on to write proposals. Sometimes the proposals are vast, formal documents, requiring months or even years of research. Sometimes, on the other hand, proposals are simple memos asking for permission to buy a piece of equipment, hire new personnel, or attend a conference. Regardless of their scope, however, proposals have one thing in common: they are your chance to present and to argue for your plans.

Proposals answer the question "What should be done?" They typically can be broken into three parts: the problem, the solution, and the justification. In short, your proposal should (1) describe a problem, (2) suggest a solution, and (3) justify or defend that solution as feasible, effective, and better than other solutions.

In a proposal all of these three sections will require development, but one section will usually require much more than the others. Sometimes the problem itself will be obvious. Almost everyone, for example, agrees that people should not be starving throughout the world. However, people still vigorously debate exactly what the best course of action is to end hunger. And, even if people could agree on a solution to world hunger—perhaps by taxing the richest nations and redistributing the wealth—there might still be arguments about exactly how that wealth should be distributed, who would distribute it, who would get it and what effects it would have on local economies.

Frequently, too, people will argue whether a problem exists at all. The current global warming debate is a good example of this. Most people agree that the earth is getting warmer because of humans burning fossil fuels, but there is much debate about how serious the problem is and if it is serious enough to warrant any action at all.

6. STRATEGY FOR DEVELOPMENT

Generally, a proposal will work through the above-mentioned categories in order from problem to solution to justification.

Describing the **PROBLEM**:

1. Lay out the facts of the situation—who is doing what to whom? when? where? why? how?
2. Describe the consequences of the situation. In particular, you will want to focus on any negative consequences that are being produced. You might also want to describe the causes of the negative consequences here. Obviously, identifying the cause of a problem allows one to address that cause so as to produce other/better effects.
3. Describe any ethical issues that arise from the situation. That is, discuss issues of right and wrong that derive from shared values or principles.
4. Remember your audience. Proposals are always concerned with particular people, especially those who have the power to make changes. Be sure to consider their special concerns (economic, social, psychological, philosophical, political).

Here are the key points to hit in the introduction:

1. The 5 W's (who, what, when, where, why, how). Right away let the reader know who is involved, what they are up to, where and when they are doing all this stuff, and why and how they are going about it.
2. Be sure to discuss why these things are happening. The logic of a proposal almost always hinges on identifying the causes of a situation and then either encouraging or discouraging more of those causes.
3. Indicate the scope and seriousness of the situation. Say how widespread the problem is and how deep the problem goes.

The **SOLUTION** is the response to the problem. Remember, you are directly responding to the problem you have just described. This means the problem description is the context that limits what you will advance as a solution while generating the specific actions of your proposal. The solution you present is the thesis of your proposal.

After you have presented your thesis/solution, you will have to show how and why it will work. This proof is the **JUSTIFICATION** and feasibility section of your paper.

There are three ways of justifying a solution: principles, consequences, and resemblance.

1. Principle — In this strategy you would describe the proposal as either conforming to or producing a situation that is "right" or "good." Those values (principles) may come from the general society, from theories of ethics (philosophy, religion), or from particular guidelines laid out by the group you are investigating (these groups could be professional organizations of doctors or lawyers or unions or the group could be the laws of a municipality, state or country).
2. Consequences — This is probably the most common strategy for defending a solution, and reports of this type are typically organized around the format of a causal argument. If you can identify the cause of the problem, then obviously addressing that cause, either by removing, altering, or encouraging it, might change the situation. However, you will not only look back at the problem as it stands, you will also look forward to the future consequences of your solution. That is, you will try to predict what effects your solution will produce.
3. Resemblance — You might also use precedent or analogy to defend your solution. That is, you can look at either previous (precedent) or similar (analogy) situations where a solution like yours has worked.

FEASIBILITY: You will very frequently, especially in business transactions, have to justify the nuts and bolts of your proposal by explaining how money can be raised for the proposal, who would do the work, when it should be done, and how long it will take. Remember, even when everyone agrees that a problem exists and everyone agrees on what should be done, there can still be quite a bit of disagreement over how it should be done and who should do it. You can see this kind of argument all the time in the bidding for contracts on large work projects.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS: Opposition to a proposal can come from many directions. Here are a few:

1. **Problem not a problem:** Your audience may not see your problem as a problem, or they might disagree about what is causing the problem which would mean that they would offer a different solution.
2. **A better way:** People might agree with you that there is a problem but think that there is a solution better than the one you offer.
3. **Unintended consequences:** People might point out the possible negative effects your proposal will produce. You will either have to show that they are wrong or argue that the negative effects are worth hazarding for the positive effects you predict.
4. **Ethics:** People could say that though your solution might be effective or expedient, it is still morally or ethically wrong or possibly inappropriate.
5. **Feasibility:** People might argue it can't be done for reasons such as time, money, or personnel.