

Organization, Option 1: Prospectus

Explanation: A **prospectus** is a short (two to three page) document meant to provide a clear description of your long-term project.

The Prospectus can be broken down into three distinct parts; 1) the introduction to your topic, its background information, and what the audience needs to know about it; 2) an overview of sources, literature, and the critical lens through which you intend to examine your topic or answer your research question; 3) a roadmap for your readers in which you break down the formal layout and structure of your project to come.

This set of activities is designed to be paired with other Graduate Writing Support Activities to help you establish the formal elements of your graduate writing. It is our hope that you can expand or incorporate this optional prospectus design into your Introduction, Literature Review, or Methods section of your research papers.

Part 1: Topic/Background Information (About 1 Page)

Purpose: Use the following questions to guide you in information about your selected topic. Always consider the needs of the audience when writing in this academic genre. Who is this paper for? What do they already know? What do they need to know? What are you still learning about the topic?

Briefly (one sentence):

- What is (are) your research topic(s)?
- Who is the primary “actor” in your topic?
- When do the primary events in this topic take place? If your topic involves ongoing activity, when did research into that topic begin? How has conversation around this topic changed over time?
- Historically, where has the topic been focused? Are there specific regions that are most effected by the topic? Are there specific populations (people, ethnicities, age ranges, etc.) affected more than others by the topic?
- Why are you most interested in the topic? Why are other researchers interested in the topic? In what ways does this topic reveal information about your research area, the field at large, or other fields?
- What *bothers* you about the topic? What controversies exist in it? What elements of the topic have other researchers failed to address when it comes to previous research?

(Note: These questions are intended as a guide. Answer as many as you can, and ignore those that you find to be irrelevant to your topic.)

For more information, see **Graduate Writing Support Activity A.3: Exploring Topics**

Part 2A: Literature Review (About 1 Page)

Purpose: In this section, determine the sources you either have already collected or that you intend to collect for use in your paper. Use the following guide to notate sources you hope to use, and create a preliminary outline for how these sources interact with each other. (Note: The organization of these sources is intended as a guide only. Your sources might all align quite different than this example.)

List out each source and write 1 sentence explaining what it is about, followed by 1 sentence explaining why you chose it.

Source Block 1: “Watershed” texts (texts that are absolutely required reading to understand this topic). Sources:

Source Block 2: Recent literature (research published about the topic from the last 5 to 10 years). Sources:

Source Block 3: Intersecting work (research from within your field that is related to your secondary topic or which informs your theoretical focus or framework lens). Sources:

Source Block 4: Controversial/dissenting opinions (research that comes to conclusions you disagree with but which can be used in your counterarguments). Sources:

Source Block 5: Related work (research from fields that are on the fringe or are indirectly related to yours). Sources:

Now that you have laid all of your sources out in front of you, consider: how do these sources connect with each other? Are there any that interact or reference each other directly? Would any of these authors disagree with each other? Academic writing is all about getting your sources to have a “conversation”; your writing should find ways to make connections between as many of these works as possible in a way that is cohesive and comprehensive.

For more information, see **Graduate Writing Support Activity 3A: Part 2, “Organizing Your Research/Annotated Bibliography”**

Part 2B: Research Question

Purpose: Use this guide to examine the “how” of your paper’s organization. Adding a research question to focus your project allows you to show your readers that you are a serious academic who is analyzing and examining your topic (and existing literature about that topic) thoroughly. Answer:

- How are you going to address your topic? What questions are you seeking to discover about the topic? How can you focus your topic into a single question? Can you answer this question using existing sources or data? Will you be able to answer it with the resources available? Is it specific? Can it be answered with more than a yes/no question? How will answering the question advance your field of study?

For more information, see **Graduate Writing Support Activity A.4: Research Questions**

Part 3: Organizing Your Draft

Purpose: Use this section to take the writing you have done in the previous two sections to draft the beginnings of your paper. At the end of the section, you will also provide a roadmap for your reader, which will help them understand how future sections of your paper will look.

Introduction: This section should introduce your reader to your topic. Provide historical information about the topic. Tell the reader when research into the topic began. Tell the reader why that information continues to be relevant. Tell the reader what question(s) you intend to answer about the topic. Introduce relevant individuals, settings, time periods, define significant key terms, and state research question.

Literature Review: This section introduces the reader to your research that you have read (or will read) in preparation for answering research questions. Tell the reader how the texts you have read answer these questions, inform the topic, provide(d) you will background information about the topic, complicate the topic, and have changed researchers' views on the topic over time. You should also use this section to tell your reader about ways you intend to further analyze these texts later on in future detail to explore topic.

Roadmap: At the end, tell your reader what sections will come next. How will you address the topic? Will you do experiments? Analyze one set of texts first, followed by another set, followed by another set? Do you intend to explore the topic chronologically? Do you intend to examine specific populations or settings before others? Will you be making suggestions on future research? Will you propose a new way of analyzing or looking at the topic? Tell the reader her, briefly. **At the end of this section, the reader should be left with very few guesses about what you intend to show them "behind the curtain" of your research paper.**

An operational Prospectus should not be long. About one page should be set aside for each of the above sections. Remember, these notes and guides are more for your benefit and should be customized and modified to suit your needs and to express information that is relevant to your audience.

For more information, see **Graduate Writing Support Activity 5A: The Literature Review**