



# Writing the research proposal

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*Thinking through process*

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# Elements of the SURF proposal

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## 1. **Statement of Purpose** (150-200 words)

*"Here is a summary of my proposal"*

## 2. **Background / Justification** (300-400 words)

*"This question is important because..."*

## 3. **Research Plan** (450-700 words)

*"This is what I will do to find an answer"*

## 4. **Qualifications** (150-250 words)

*"I am the best person to do this because..."*

## 5. **Citations** (not included in length limit)

# Thinking through the whole

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The point of the proposal is to walk the reader through ***what you are doing, why it matters, how you will get the data you need, while showing how you are prepared to do this work.***

Even though each section is separated out, the whole should ***hang together and have a logical flow.***

***Being able to concisely pitch your research is a very important skill - it takes practice!***

# 1. Research Statement

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- 150-200 words - short, concise!
- Capture the big picture
  - **What** you want to find out, **how** you'll do it, and **why** it matters.
  - (You'll develop each in more detail in the following sections.)
- Consider:
  - What's the most interesting "cut" onto your themes?
  - What do you think you have data for?
- **Probably the hardest to do well, and also the most important!**
  - Ask around, get feedback!
  - Consider writing last?

# Exercise 1: What's it all about?

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Take a minute to jot down your topic/themes of interest.  
Share your topic with a partner, then together:

- A) Try to come up with some key question(s) for each topic  
- “I want to find out...”
- B) Try to decide on some frames or hooks - “What is this a *case of?*”/“Why would someone outside my field care?”

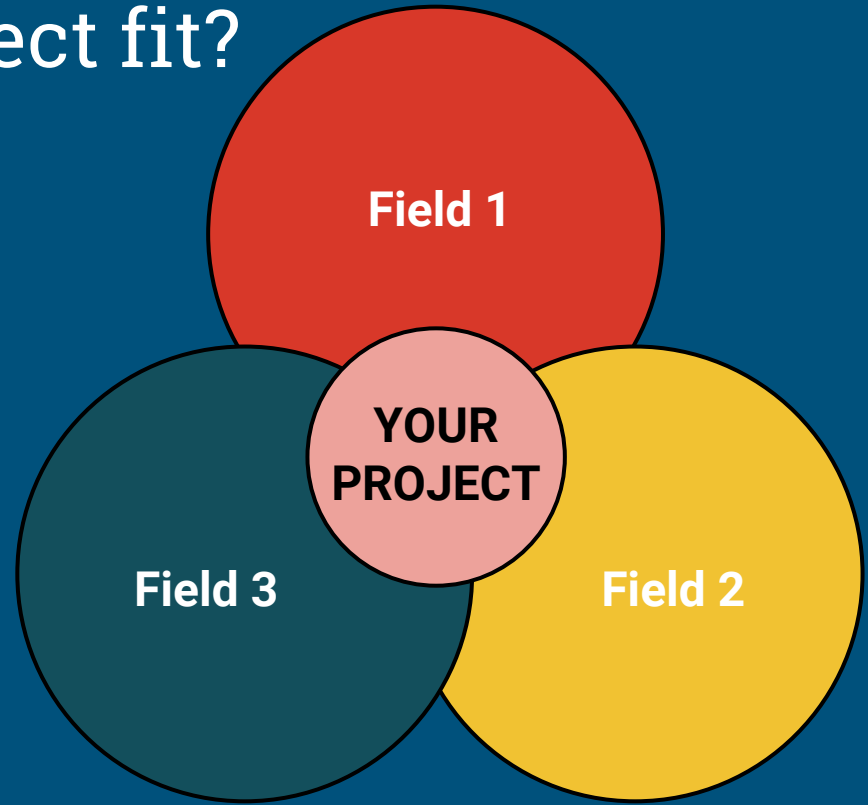
## 2. Background

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- 300-400 words (one of your longer sections!)
- What is already known about your field(s) of research?
- What conversations, debates, history exists - *what are you engaging, how are you contributing?*
- This section answers the **why** question: *why is your project needed?*
- Cite cite cite! (literature review!)
  - Not exhaustive, but “signposting” - show us you understand the “state of the field”

# Where does your project fit?

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# Exercise 2: “Daisy”

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- First, make a list of all the fields you think you’re engaging.
  - Try to be specific: not just “Literature” or “Ecology,” but “rangeland science” or “Modern Irish novels”
- Narrow these down to a small handful of the most important and relevant (maybe 3-5).
  - If your work were published in an edited volume or journal, where would it “fit”?
- Draw your daisy! (And hang onto it!)



# 3. Research Plan

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- This is your methods section, showing us *how you will carry out the research to gather the data you need*. (450-700 words)
- Think about the how, where, and when, the logistics and nitty gritty!
- Give us a *timeline*, either by week or in phases, showing what you plan to accomplish at each stage.
  - There may be a logical flow to this, or it may be a question of access (i.e. I need to get this data at the same stage because I'll be in the city where I can get it!)
  - Show when and how you'll check in with your mentor!
- This is a plan - *it will change!*

# Exercise 3: Brainstorm

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- On a piece of paper, make two columns.
- In one column, make a list of all the data you might want to try to gather.
  - This should answer your questions from before.
  - Think about types of data, data sources (locations, groups of people)
  - Can be broad or specific at this stage (though the more specific the better!)
- In the other column, write how you might go about *collecting* that data.
  - Interviews? Archival work? Surveys? Literature reviews?
  - This will depend on your field and training, but also should stem from the data you need!

# 4. Qualifications

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- Your final section brings us back to you - why are *you* a good fit to do this work? (150-250 words)
- You may be tempted to be humble or underconfident - *don't be!* You've put in thought to prepare, and no one else is out there doing quite what you are.
- Think about skills acquired (research methods?), field familiarity (classes, literature reviews, past experience?), and anything else that might apply.
  - If you're missing key things in your research plan, consider noting how you'll fill those gaps!
- Also include partners/collaborators.
  - Who are you working with? Who will vouch for you?
  - Also include permissions acquired or intended - human subjects?

# Exercise 4: Preparations brainstorm

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- Given what you've already listed in your methods brainstorm, how are you *already* prepared to do this research?
- If you aren't, *what do you need to do* between now and when you start your research?
- Think about classes to take, skills to learn, connections to establish...
- *If some of this seems too hard to do between now and summer, go back and reconsider the questions you are asking and what data you need!*

# 5. Citations

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- *Cite. Your. Sources.*
- Use the style appropriate to your field - consistency!
- Focus on key references in fields you're engaging (part 2) as well as any additional texts central to your framing.
- Keep to a page or less! (~10 or fewer works?)

# Putting it all together

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**You should hopefully be able to answer:**

- *“I want to find out...”*
- *“It is important that we find out/know more about \_\_\_\_\_ because...”*
- *“To answer my research question, I will...”*
- *“I am particularly well-suited to do this research because...”*

**If you can complete these sentences,  
you are well on your way to a research proposal!**

# Bonus round: human subjects?

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- **Does your research involve people? Which groups?**
- <https://cphs.berkeley.edu/> ← Read up, come talk to me!
- We will have an info session on IRB/Human Subjects issues in a few weeks: **Wednesday, February 27, 2:00pm – 4:00pm, Durant Hall, Room 9**
- But start now! Get advice from SURF advisors or going to CPHS directly.

# Bonus round: Letter of recommendation

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- ***Professors are busy people - start as early as you can!***
- Reach out, explain your ideas, and work with them to refine them. They may have great suggestions to help you put it all together!
- They will write the letter per suggestions on the SURF website - consider sending them the link:  
<http://surf.berkeley.edu/surf-ls-apply>



# Come get advice...

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Once you have thought through all this, come say hello and get advice for your proposal!

SURF advisor information can be found here:

<http://surf.berkeley.edu/advisors>

My office hour sign ups can be found here:

<https://www.wejoinin.com/EmilyRemirez>



# Thank you!

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