

Mastering the Essay Lesson 12 – Essay Synthesis, Part 1

Readings

- **Why I Love Writing Essays** (Emilio Chloum)
- **Example Essay Proposal**

Paper/Project Proposal

- An essay proposal is a thoughtful plan for your paper, a road map that you anticipate following.
- Of course, you cannot know exactly where the process of your research will take you and the proposal does not bind you using anything that turns out to be a dead end. However, a successful proposal does convey the impression to the reader that you have anticipated many of the potential potholes in the road and that you have already devised a plan to avoid them.
- **Do at least some preliminary research** (find some overview on your topic before you start writing the proposal!)
 - For instance, if your paper topic focused on the history of your town, your whole project might be thrown for a loop if you discovered hardly any information was available regarding its history. In a successful proposal, you show that you have a good sense of what is possible to do with your essay and what is not. For example, you would make an investigation into what kinds of materials are available to you for research, and then either confirm that they are available in your proposal, or change the focus to a more easily researchable topic.
- Every instructor has his or her own expectations for a topic proposal so it's important to find out as much as possible about what the proposal should look like. However, you'll probably be asked to include at least some of the following elements:
 - Title: Must tell the reader the specific focus of the paper. Can also be clever. For example: "Essay Proposal: Literary Forerunners of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*" or "Before the Legend: *The Scarlet Pimpernel's* Literary Prototypes—Topic Proposal"
 - Topic: This is why I am interested; let me describe it for you and begin to show you why you ought to be interested as well. Be sure you define all your key terms. For example: "I propose to investigate whether The Smiling Face Charity distributes the money it receives fairly (i.e. whether the highest possible amount of its funds are used directly to aid the needy, rather than to enrich the charity's administration.)"
- **Narrow your focus from a broad interest.** Do not try to make a compendium of questions you would like to answer (or look into) as if you were taking two to three years to write a book. Simply decide, after researching the topic a bit and seeing what is worthwhile to ask about it, what is a good question that could be turned into a thesis.
- **Don't feel pressured to put a thesis in the proposal**—just a topic. A question is a great route to take, since you'll make up your mind based on your research.

Include your working thesis if you have one, but acknowledge that it might change based on the evidence you find.

- **What is the significance of your work? Why should your reader care?** Too often students who are excited by a topic expect any other reader to be equally captivated; however, the reason for excitement, the significance of the project, is rarely self-evident. You must address the daunting questions: Why should others care? So what? Include a little about what makes this subject worth looking at.
- It can be a good idea to address what it is about your topic that is open to varying opinions, to show that you are not just presenting something unworthy of argument.
- **You need to designate in the proposal what will constitute as evidence.** What will your indicators be? If you are interested in finding out whether The Smiling Face Charity lives up to what it promises, will you read only from their website? Will you read only from articles that criticize it? If you are comparing traditional fairy tales with their Disney movie adaptations, will you be focusing on just the written versions of both (the tales and the scripts) or look at the movies as a whole? What counts as “the original fairy tales”—anything you find in a fairy tale book, or just the versions written by people like the Brothers Grimm or Hans Christian Andersen? You don’t need to spend an enormous amount of time describing the parameters of your research, but you should be able to indicate what you specifically would like to investigate.

Proposed Bibliography

- At the end of your proposal, you may be asked to include a proposed bibliography.
- You do not need to feel completely bound by your proposed bibliography—not every book in it has to end up in the actual paper’s bibliography, although they should be similar.
- It needs to convey a sense of what is available, as well as the fact that you have a strategy for your research.
- Some instructors will ask for annotated bibliographies, but you will not be required to write one for this assignment.

Assignment

Over the next three weeks, you will write your special three-week writing project, and end up with a 1,000-word persuasive essay on a subject of your choice. First, determine a topic you are interested in writing about. The essay may be a research paper, an argumentative essay, a compare/contrast essay, a cause and effect essay, or literary analysis essay (no expository or personal essays - you need to take a definite side). You need to do research. Ask yourself questions such as these:

- What am I interested in learning more about? What am I already passionate about? What is worth my time to write about? What will stretch me, but also is something in which I can feel confident?

- Who is my intended readership?
- What might some good research questions be to guide me in learning more about my topic?
- What resources do I have available to me in enough supply that I can properly conduct research?
- What formatting style do I want to use? What makes sense?

This week, narrow down your topic as far as you can (email your instructor in the next 36 hours to approve your topic), do research, and write a proposal, including a proposed bibliography. The proposal should be about a page long and have a specific question that your eventual essay will answer *or* a working thesis. Make sure that the topic you choose has enough scope on which to spend 1,000 words (4-5 pages). Make sure the proposal explains why the topic is worth considering, what strategies you will use to write it, and define any potentially ambiguous terms you might use.

The proposal itself should have two or three well-written paragraphs, and your proposed bibliography should have at least four sources.

Use the "Example Essay Proposal" in today's readings as your model. It is fine to start working on other elements of the essay ahead of time such as outline and rough draft, but only the proposal needs to be turned in this week. Next week you'll turn in an outline and whatever progress you have made on your rough draft. The week after that you'll turn in a complete essay.