

How to write a study proposal

Some graduate programs, especially thesis-based programs, will require you to submit a project study proposal. These proposals will vary in length and content depending on which program you choose.

Finding a research topic

When drafting your proposal, you should find an intersection of your own educational/work/research experience and what the program offers. Typically, each department/program will have its own set of strengths and focused areas of expertise. You should be aware of these strengths and specialties and try to work these in to your own application. As a graduate student, you will be an integral (and important!) part of department life, so make sure to discuss how your program of work fits in to the broader research/teaching environment.

Course-based programs require statements that are more specific to the work involved with your degree program. Some of these statements involve detail on your area of specialization, educational goals, and career expectations. Furthermore, professional course-based graduate degrees like a Master of Social Work or a Master of Education require relevant work and/or teaching experience that you will describe in your proposal application.

Don't know what to write about?

If you are stuck trying to think of a suitable project, don't worry. A good first step is to think upon a large project you worked on as a senior undergraduate. Did you write an undergraduate thesis? Did you write a term paper that exposed you to especially interesting subject matter? Did you conduct lab research you would like to explore further? Have you encountered any pressing issues in your work experience, community, or personal life that you would like to explore in greater detail?

Building upon any previous experience will be key to designing the basic outline of your proposal. Such experience provides a useful foundation of knowledge in the subject matter that will help shape what you want to study in graduate school.

Research involving Indigenous individuals or communities

Students wishing to pursue research projects involving Indigenous individuals or groups, or to use Indigenous Ways of Knowing in their own research, should familiarize themselves with the ethics regulations governing academic research.

You must maintain a respectful attitude while pursuing research with Indigenous communities and should be aware of the unique histories, ways of knowing, and authority structures of these different communities.

Start by consulting the [Tri-Council Ethics Policy](#) before undertaking any research project involving Indigenous individuals and/or communities, including your own community or family members. You

should also familiarize yourself with the University of Calgary regulations on [Indigenous Research and Ethics](#).

Writing a great study proposal

Don't be afraid to ask for help when drafting these project proposals. Look to your referees for advice on how to proceed, or even better, have them look over drafts of your proposal.

Also, get friends, family members, or classmates to look over your proposal as well. It always helps to have somebody outside of your discipline/program proofread your proposal. They may be able to identify areas where you use too much jargon, assume the reader has advanced knowledge on your subject, or lack clarity in certain areas. The more people who look over your proposal, the better edited it will be!

The better written your proposal is, the clearer it is on the problems it wishes to address, and the better researched it is, will demonstrate to admissions committees that you are capable of graduate-level studies.