
Writing a Proposal for the Senior Design Project

INTRODUCTION OR OVERALL TOPIC DESCRIPTION

It is important to **begin by asking what exactly is it you want to do, how, why, when and where** – the same questions your instructor or prospective client will be asking.

These questions are directly related to the Design Problem or Opportunity, the Objectives and the Criteria. For example, if you state “I want to create new signs for the Museum of Anthropology” you will then be required to explain how you plan to execute this idea, why you see a need to create these signs, what kinds of problems you might run into, and how these signs might look upon completion.

You can begin by thinking broadly about your basic topic, the name or concept of your project, but then you must narrow it down. You must be specific and your focus must be obvious in the introduction.

DESIGN PROBLEM OR OPPORTUNITY

Begin by asking yourself why you think there is a need for your product or service. How are you filling in a void? If there isn't an obvious need, then you might ask how could you create a need or desire for your project. Here are some possible ways of getting started:

- This problem (try to be as specific as you can) has been overlooked in the past and needs to be addressed...
- The curriculum as it stands now needs to be made available to a broader range of children with different learning abilities.
- Because there has been limited access to ... I propose that...
- The company or community does not have ... so I intend to provide...

Here are some useful words and phrases that suggest that there is a need not being met:

ignores • neglects • misses • needs • demands • requires • overlooks • discounts • fails • does not take into account • necessitates • calls for • disregards • fails to address

Remember to take your audience into account. You don't want to accidentally offend a client by using language that is in some way insulting and you don't want to assume your client knows what you intend to do simply because you've spoken about it in the past.

DESIGN OBJECTIVE

What is it you intend to do? At the proposal stage students are often afraid to get too specific, primarily because they think that if they put a plan down in writing, they will be committed to doing only that.

But proposals are flexible to some degree: the most important thing you need to do is persuade your audience that your project is viable. In order to do that you need to provide some details.

It isn't enough to say that you "want to generate a greater interest in modern dance" or you'd "like to make consumers aware of larger social issues as they relate to marketing clothes for teenagers". These are vague objectives and your instructor/reader/client will want to know how you plan on meeting them. Your design objectives should explain how you intend to resolve, fix or provide an answer to the problem or opportunity you've outlined above.

As designers set out their objectives, they often discover that they have more than one, or that their project can be (and maybe should be) broken down into two or three different projects, programs, or timelines. If this is the case, you might want to address this at the outset by providing different sections or parts, or you might want to say something like, "my first set of objectives is... my second set of objectives address..."

Here are some phrases that are typical objective statements:

- I intend to create a complete package that will include...
- I plan to execute this project by...
- Solving this problem involves meeting with the clientele ... observing ... discussing ... organizing ... fixing ... asking ... completing ... providing ... illustrating...
- The objective of this project is to improve the existing ... inform new users ... create an awareness ... educate ... provide the experience of ... establish a realistic concept of ... excite the child's imagination ... solve the problem of ... encourage people to make intelligent decisions regarding...

DESIGN CRITERIA

Coming up with design criteria is often difficult when you're in the first stages of a proposal, but it is essential that you ask yourself what you will end up with if your project is successful. Saying, "the package will be aesthetically pleasing", or "this product will perform well" is too vague. Your instructor or potential client will want to know why and how it's going to meet this criteria.

My senior project will fulfill the following criteria (or meet the following criteria). It will:

- be inviting to/appeal to...
- be suitable for...
- be available to...
- be marketed by/to...
- draw attention to...
- establish a new way of looking at...
- take into account different age groups/cultural differences/different learning abilities...

TARGET AUDIENCE

Is the gender of your target audience relevant? Are they a teenager, a child, an adult between the ages of 18 and 35, or all of the above? Will this product be accessible to anyone with a computer? Will it require other technical support that may limit its users? Will it appeal to people of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds? Is your target audience wealthy, middle income, poor, or will this product appeal to people of any income level?

PERSONAL OBJECTIVES OR EDUCATIONAL GOALS

If you are asked to include this in your proposal, you should begin by asking yourself what it is you hope to learn. Here are some possible answers. They will not be applicable to everyone!

- improve written communication skills
- understand the educational needs of a cultural community
- explore and widen knowledge of sustainable design

RESEARCH

Under this heading, it is important to list the research you have already done and the kind of research you need to do in order to complete your project.

What research have you done so far? Summarize. This should be no more than a paragraph – perhaps two if absolutely necessary.

What research do you still have to complete?

- Who will you be interviewing?
- What will you be observing first-hand?
- Are there any products out there that are similar to yours?
- Do you have a mentor you will be relying on for help?
- How much will your product cost? What kind of market exists for it?

A COUPLE OF FINAL NOTES

Be as clear, concise and precise as possible. Go over your proposal with a classmate or bring it to the Writing Centre. Avoid unnecessary jargon if you can.

RESOURCES

Writing for Design Professionals by Stephen Kliment, a book that's available in the ECUAD library, provides information on writing proposals, job applications, creating portfolios and more.