

Assignment Genres: Writing Research Proposals and Papers

Your first writing step is to make sure you understand the assignment.

Read the prompt and ask yourself:

Why was this assigned?	Professors design assignments with specific learning objectives in mind. Does your professor intend for you to learn how to write a literature review, a research proposal, or a policy memo? Is your task to demonstrate your understanding of a concept, or to practice critiquing a theory?
What am I being asked to do?	<p>Most prompts contain key verbs, or action words, that help you determine the main tasks. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill divides these words into three categories: <i>information</i>, <i>relation</i>, and <i>interpretation</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Information words ask you to demonstrate your knowledge about a subject. Examples include define, describe, explain, illustrate, summarize, trace, and research.• Relation words ask you to show connections between ideas. Compare, contrast, apply, cause, and relate fall into this category.• Interpretation words ask for you to defend your own argument, thesis, or idea. These words include assess, prove, justify, evaluate, respond, support, synthesize, analyze, and argue.
What evidence is required?	Some assignments, like a reflective memo, may not require any formal evidence. More often, though, assignments will ask you to draw on outside research or other types of evidence.

About research papers

A research paper is usually a final project that you work on throughout the semester. Often you have a great deal of freedom in your selection of topic and how you plan to conduct your research. You may be asked to design the project from start to finish, including defining the research question, sampling, methodology, analysis, implications, etc. Whether you collect and analyze data for a full research project or submit only a proposal will vary across courses. Likely, you will have multiple due dates for different steps in the process, but either way, it will require significant work.

Sample research proposal assignment:

<i>Draft 1 (due 10/2):</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Identify a question or a problem space to be studied.</i>• <i>Brainstorm research methods to approach the question.</i>
<i>Draft 2 (due 10/14):</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Provide a thesis statement that narrows the problem space to a specific and manageable topic.</i>• <i>Articulate and justify a research question.</i>• <i>Provide brief review of a few relevant research articles.</i>• <i>Describe all essential information about the steps that will be carried out (e.g. resources, materials, participants, instruments, protocols, etc.) to the extent that you have decided.</i>• <i>If applicable, provide hypotheses about likely or hoped-for results.</i>
<i>Workshop (11/13):</i>	<i>Bring your preliminary findings to class so we can help you think about how to present them in poster format.</i>
<i>Final presentation (12/4):</i>	<i>See poster presentation rubric.</i>

Sample research project:

Students will work in groups organized around a K-12 school site in the area, which we have selected as sites where effective policies and practices are already occurring. Working closely with school leaders and teachers, groups will identify a problem of practice related to inclusion, collect data, and use research and information from the class to present a set of recommendations for the school.

Reading the prompt

Format	Research papers and proposals follow a standard academic format.
Evidence	Requires research beyond what you have read for the course.
Audience	Academic
Purpose	The main goals of a research proposal or project are to design and possibly conduct, a research study: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pose a research question• May sometimes include pre-determined hypothesis and methods• Discuss methods and findings• Discuss implications of the findings (e.g. areas for future research, policy implications)
