

FYS | Prof. Cope
Prospectus Guidelines

A prospectus is a proposal to undertake a research project. Its general purpose is to *sell* the reader on the importance of carrying out the research. The prospectus contains the following elements:

- 1) A provocative title that communicates to the reader the general focus of the study.
- 2) A clear and concise introduction to the topic.
- 3) A well-formulated question—or a series of well-formulated questions—related to the research topic. (Finding the answers to these questions will likewise drive your research.)
- 4) A rationale for the choice of topic. The rationale spells out the special relevance of the topic and may allude to the motivations of the researcher to carry out the project.
- 5) A hypothesis. What do you imagine will be discovered by undertaking this research?
- 6) A description of the methodology. How do you plan to gather the information and materials that will allow you to answer the questions posed? Be as specific as possible. Saying that you will go to the library or use the internet is insufficient.
- 7) A timeline to completion that spells out the particular phases of your research.

A prospectus does not contain (at least for our purposes):

- 1) A thesis statement. The thesis statement will be developed as the research is being conducted.
- 2) A conclusion. The conclusion will be developed once the research has been completed and after a period of reflection.
- 3) A literature review or bibliography. These will come as the project develops.

Some general suggestions:

- 1) Use the active voice. The active voice projects confidence, which in turn inspires confidence that the proposed plan of inquiry is worthwhile.
- 2) Revise and polish. A well organized and well articulated prospectus gives the impression that the research has merit. A poorly organized and poorly written prospectus gives the impression that the topic lacks merit.
- 3) The length of the prospectus should be proportionate to that of the project. Since the minimum length of the research paper is ten pages, a two-page prospectus is sufficient provided that it covers all of the bases.
- 4) Since any claims made in your introduction to the topic will constitute your foundational premises, make sure that these premises are reasonable and defensible, as arguments built on false premises lead to invalid and unsustainable conclusions.
- 5) Provide enough detail to establish the feasibility of your proposal, but remember that a prospectus proposes a direction of inquiry and therefore is concise by definition.
- 6) Finally, remember that while a prospectus may speculate as to eventual findings, it does not offer a preview of them.

Note:

- 1) A prospectus articulates and spells out the scope of a proposed inquiry. However, keep in mind that the scope of your inquiry will likely evolve as you carry out your research.
- 2) This is a graded paper that falls under the category of Focused Drafts of Research Paper.