

What Does a Topic Proposal Look Like?

Topic proposals typically include the following elements:

1. A research/general question you are asking. For the purposes of this class, a research question might look like this: “To address climate change, the United States must produce vast amounts of electricity that does not produce greenhouse gasses. How can we do this? I want to examine energy sources...”
2. What you’re going to write about. In a single sentence or two, tell your reader what you are going to examine/write/argue in your paper. This is your thesis statement for the paper. Hint: The easiest writing is persuasive writing (aka argumentative writing or position paper), so consider writing an argument (e.g., “Nuclear power will best meet the United States’ electricity needs while not adding to the atmosphere’s carbon load”). Your topic should be focused and doable in 6-8 pages (but not so narrow that you can’t find scholarly and other sources to support your stance). Another hint: make sure you are interested in your subject choice. This topic might become the centerpiece of your sustainability presentation, so you’ll be thinking about it for a while. Make sure you want to think about it for a while.
3. Why does your topic matter? Once you’ve written out your brief explanation of your topic, tell your readers why it is important. Why is it interesting, and/or why should the reader care about the topic you want to write about? Note that all of the writers we have examined this semester have examined the “who cares?” angle. In one way or another, they have told us why their discussion matters.
4. Address how you will support what you write—what sources will you look at? What will be your evidence that proves your claim? This assignment requires that you use trustworthy sources. This usually means that you’d use academic, peer-reviewed sources to prove your points (just as Hurley, Kolbert, and McKibben do). But there are some types of real-world writing that do not require academic sources. If you’re writing something like that, you don’t necessarily have to incorporate peer-reviewed sources into the Your Choice paper. (For the literature review or annotated bibliography, the final assignment for this course, you must consult and report on five peer-reviewed sources.) Before you start writing your topic proposal, do some initial research to get on top of the quality and quantity of information available to help you prove your claim.

Topic proposal length: 500-800 words (1.5-3 pages, double-spaced)

Your choice paper length: 6-8 pages usually, double-spaced