



UNIVERSITY *of*  
DENVER

UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER

# How to Write a Proposal for the Undergraduate Research Center

\*These slides are adapted from one of our workshops to be used for DIY consultations.\*

University Writing Center  
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# Agenda

As you go through this consultation, by yourself or with a partner, try to separate yourself and objectively focus on and/or discuss the following five areas.

How is each of these areas addressed in the proposal?

- \* Research question
- \* Methods
- \* Fit and ethos
- \* Feasibility
- \* Audience

# #1. Research Question

Questions for writers:

- \* How do you define the research problem or creative endeavor?
- \* How does your project fill a gap in existing knowledge or the extant body of creative works, and why is it important to fill that gap?
- \* What is the question you hope to answer?
- \* Why are you undertaking the project?

If any of these questions are not yet answered, writer should work on articulating answers.

# CARS (Create a Research Space)

- \* Academic proposals often follow a specific introduction format, using a set of moves that help readers to understand context, need, and purpose of proposals. This template or model is called CARS (Create a Research Space.)
- \* John Swales (1990) suggests that effective research intros make three moves. These are easily adapted to research (and creative) proposals:

Move 1. Establish a Territory

Move 2. Establish a Niche

Move 3. Occupy the Niche



Establish a territory: tell us what's been said:

- \* Claim centrality
- \* Make a topic

generalization

- \* Review previous

research

Establish a niche: tell us what's been missing:

- \* Make a counter-claim
- \* Indicate a gap
- \* Raise a question
- \* Continue a tradition

Occupy a niche: fill the gap

- \* Outline purposes
- \* Indicate importance

Source:

Swales, John. "Create a Research Space'(CARS) Model of Research Introductions." (2008).

# Application

Questions for writers:

- \* Where are you already creating a research space?
- \* Where do you see opportunities to do this?
- \* What might these moves look like in your draft?

OR

If the writer is not yet indicating a research space, these questions might help to generate then:

- \* What *is* the territory in which your project fits? How can you talk about and frame this territory?
- \* What is the specific niche you might carve out?
- \* How can you think of your project in terms of filling the niche?

## #2. Methods

### Research projects:

- \* What is your data?
- \* How will you collect that data?
- \* Why is this the right design for your project?

### Creative projects:

- \* What are your materials?
- \* How will you work with those materials?
- \* How will this project connect to broader questions in your discipline?

- \* Pay attention to the beginning and the end: what are the specific steps you need to take, in what order?
- \* Subdivide: what are the sub-steps? How much can you / do you need to break down each step?
- \* Be specific. Methods require attention to the who, the what, the when, and the where.
- \* Use measurable language whenever possible:

Less measurable:

Understand

Know

Appreciate

Think

More measurable:

Practice

Demonstrate

Communicate

Apply



# Application

Take a few minutes to either discuss and/or to take notes and pose questions in writing about your methods:

What do you need to figure out to specify methods?

What is your timeline, and how do specific steps fit it?

How specific can you get those steps?

What will you collect?

What are your potential outcomes?

## #3. Fit and Ethos

- \* How does this project relate to your goals?
- \* Why are you the right person to do this project?
- \* What background prepares you for this work?
- \* How does this project develop your skills and abilities?
- \* How can *you* create a strong and credible proposal?

# Application: Individual writing

Take a few minutes to do some reflection and writing in response to at least a few of these questions:

- \* How does this project relate to your goals?
- \* Why are you the right person to do this project?
- \* What background prepares you for this work?
- \* How does this project develop your skills and abilities?
- \* How can *you* create a strong and credible proposal?

## #4. Feasibility

- \* How realistic is this project, given your timeline?
- \* How realistic is this project, given that *you* are the one completing it?
- \* Is your research question focused enough to explore in the timeline submitted?



## #5. Audience

- \* What can you reasonably assume an educated but non-specialist reader knows about your overall topic?
- \* What major terms, theories, or concepts do you need to define or explain?
- \* Where might an example be a useful way to help a non-scientific reader understand your scientific description?
- \* How can you help this audience to appreciate the importance of your project?

# Application

Consider what kinds of examples, analogies, definitions, etc. you might need to provide for your complex ideas to be intelligible to your reader.

# Reflect

Take a few minutes to do some reflection and writing in response to at least a few of these questions:

- Which portion of your proposal do you feel most confident about? What exactly are you doing in the section/portion that is effective and successful? How could you implement the effectiveness/success of this section in other places in your proposal?
- Which portion of your proposal do you feel the least confident about? What do you think needs to happen in this section/portion in order for you to feel it is effective/successful? Which specific strategies/questions from the DIY consultation can you use as you continue working on this section? What effect will implementing these strategies/considering these questions have on your proposal?