

Writing a Research Prospectus

WHAT IS A PROSPECTUS?

A prospectus is a proposal of what you are going to argue or examine, produced in as clear and concise a manner as possible. Some professors may have their own guidelines that should be followed regarding a prospectus. In the absence of specific guidelines, follow this general format. Please note that a prospectus is different from an abstract. For details about an abstract, review the abstract page.

What does the prospectus include?

- An introduction to the topic to be argued or explored in a clear and brief manner.
- A statement of the main question(s) to be addressed or researched. Although a formal thesis may not be required at this stage (that is at your professor's discretion), you must note what you intend to "answer" through the research. However, if your topic is of a **scientific nature**, a **hypothesis** is essential and must state what you intend to prove (or disprove).
- A summarization of the basic arguments that support your answer or thesis.
- Any research materials already found or used in the prospectus. It is essential to convey that you have started thinking about the topic and have begun preliminary research. You may also want to include the author's name, title of the work, and why this research may be relevant to the topic. Keep in mind that these sources are not set in stone; you are not limited to these sources and can choose at a later date to either use them or not. The basic idea is to show that you have begun research.

What writing style should be used?

- You want to convey that the research being conducted is valid and important. Usually, the prospectus is written in a formal academic style. That is, the prospectus should be written in third person (for example, "the investigator," or "the researcher" instead of "I") and in an active voice. Here, check with the professor's personal requirements, as some prospectuses may not be as formal.

How long should the prospectus be?

- This is typically up to the professor. Longer and more complex research papers will require a longer and more detailed prospectus. However, remember to keep the prospectus as clear and concise as possible; generally, a range of one to two pages is recommended.