

Short Assignment #3: Prospectus

For this assignment, you will write a prospectus in 500 to 750 words, as well as a Works Cited page with at least two sources.

What is a prospectus?

A prospectus is a statement that one writes in order to describe the various elements of a project they hope to undertake. Prospectuses take many forms depending on the context in which they are written, and nearly every profession requires some sort of a prospectus. Someone working in business will have to write a prospectus (or a business plan) in order to attract investors or to obtain a loan to start one's business. Similarly, scientific researchers often write research prospectuses in order to obtain both public and private funding for their projects. In publishing, nonfiction writers often write prospectuses (or a book proposals) in order to get a publisher to buy their book projects. And in academics, a doctoral candidate must write a prospectus that is approved by a committee before she can even begin to write her dissertation. In all these cases, prospectuses are usually written in order to obtain financial or institutional support for one's project, which makes them an absolutely crucial part of any professional's work. Ultimately, a prospectus can mean the difference between being able to pursue your intended project or not.

What kind of prospectus will you be writing in this class?

You will be writing an **academic prospectus**, which summarizes not only the topic of your final research paper, but also states your working thesis, what the stakes of that argument are, and how you will go about proving your argument.

Why are you writing a prospectus in this class?

Learning how to write a strong prospectus is essential to succeeding in almost any profession. While different professions demand different types of project proposals that include different types of information organized according to different conventions, all of them are about **the art of being about to articulate the purpose of your longer project in a concise and precise manner**. It is likely that you might be asked to write prospectuses or paper proposals in your upper-level college courses, as well. So this is a chance to develop a skill you will most certainly be asked to use later on.

The other purposes of writing a prospectus in this class are 1. To get you thinking seriously about what you want to write for your final major project and whether or not that project is feasible and 2. So that, based on your prospectus, I can help you properly develop your paper. In journalism, this is what they call "front end editing." Front-end editing is crucial to helping any writer use their time well. It's often the case that writers without good front-end editing will waste a lot of time pursuing stories that go nowhere. Good front-end editing helps a writer find the path of least resistance when researching and it also ensures that they don't pursue story ideas that have no legs. There is nothing worse than spending hours on something that you eventually have to scrap because it was simply a poorly developed idea.

What your prospectus needs to include:

- 1. Topic:** The topic is the general area you want to write about. Examples of topics are things like: "Ebola in America," "ISIS," "the Cold War," or "representations of the legal system on television." Topics tend to be broad, and are like the "field" in which questions are asked.
- 2. Question:** Topics are not questions. You ask a question within the area of the topic. One topic could lead to many different questions. For example, the topic "Ebola in America" could have the following questions: "What are the chances of Ebola becoming a real epidemic in America?" "How did Ebola come to the United States?" "What is our government doing to prevent the spread of Ebola?" "What myths are being

spread about Ebola?” or even “Is Ebola something we should truly be worried about?” You can see that there could be hundreds of possible questions.

When you find a question, or a few possible questions that truly intrigue or interest you, you should analyze them. Is your question too vague? Is it too narrow? Can it be answered with a yes or a no, or does it demand a more complex answer? Think about other ways to ask the same question (that is, reword it). Do whatever it takes to become as clear as possible about the question you are asking. **Also be sure that your question can produce a complex answer.**

It is also important to learn to recognize the kinds of questions asked in particular disciplines. For example, literary scholars often pose questions about what certain texts mean, how they were produced, and what they reflect about the context in which they were produced. Historians, on the other hand, often ask cause and effect sorts of questions—they want to know why certain historical events happened. And legal scholars tend to be interested in how laws have been, are, or should be interpreted.

Remember: A good complex claim will come from good questions; a poor complex claim will come from unclear questions.

3. Working Thesis: Your working thesis should attempt to answer your question based on some preliminary research. It should not be based on a hunch, but on information you have started to analyze and synthesize. For that reason, **you must find at least two sources in order to develop your working thesis.**

The way you will find the three sources you need to develop a good working thesis is through the question you are asking. Look for sources that attempt to answer your question. **And make sure to evaluate your sources carefully.** Ask yourself whether the answers they are providing are sophisticated and complex. And be sure not to use the first three sources you find. Look at a few sources and then pick the ones that, based on your analytical reading, seem like the richest sources to start building your argument and your research paper.

4. Roadmap: The prospectus needs to make clear **how you are going to answer your question**, or how you are going to defend your thesis (that's two ways of saying the same thing). If you have a good question and good sources, it should be clear how you need to go about answering it.

5. Works Cited: The prospectus needs to have a preliminary works cited page on which you will build as you continue researching. These should include **scholarly sources**. It might be the case that you find good sources that are not considered scholarly per se. You may use these sources, but only in conjunction with **at least two scholarly sources**, which may include entire books, chapters of books, and scholarly journal articles. Be careful, because not all books are considered scholarly resources.

After you write your prospectus:

The final paper may deviate from your prospectus. As you begin to research more deeply and think more critically, you might decide to use entirely different sources or make an entirely different argument or even ask a different question. That's ok. That's part of the researching and writing process. Hopefully, by writing a prospectus and doing some initial research, you won't be in a situation where you have to find an entirely new topic a day before your paper is due.

A good prospectus will:

- Concisely and clearly state the topic, research question, and working thesis for your final research paper
- It will incorporate relevant information from scholarly sources
- It will clearly outline a potential roadmap for how you might build your argument
- Include rhetorical choices appropriate for your chosen audience

Audience:

The audience for your research paper will be an academic audience. Still, you need to decide what academic discipline it is that you are specifically targeting. For example, if you are writing about Ebola, are you writing about Ebola for an audience of biologists? Cultural Anthropologists? Public health scholars? Historians? Literary scholars? You'll need to know which academic audience you are writing for so:

1. You can use the appropriate language/discourse/jargon of that discipline
2. Know what information your audience will already have so that you don't state the obvious
3. Be aware of the current conversation scholars in this discipline are having about your chosen topic

To this end, you want to be sure that you are reading your sources not only for their content, but also for **how** they are being written (that is: you must also read rhetorically). Make sure to identify the conventions being used. What terms do these scholars regularly use (we often call this sort of discipline specific language "jargon?") What information do they include that, say, a newspaper article might not (for example, they will likely be way more in depth)? What information do they exclude that, say, a magazine article for a more general audience might (for example, they might not include basic information that they know other scholars will already have)?

SPECIFICATIONS

- Your prospectus must be 500-750 words, NOT INCLUDING your Works Cited
- It must include a Works Cited page with at least two scholarly sources
- It must be in MLA formatting and include MLA citations

Any paper that does not meet these specifications will not be accepted.

Due Date: Post to Canvas by 11:59 PM, Monday, May 11

Short Assignment #4: Annotated Bibliography

For this assignment, you will write an annotated bibliography in 500 to 750 words. Your annotated bibliography must contain at least four sources, two of which must be scholarly sources. These are sources that relate to your final research paper and are hopefully sources that you can use. They can be sources that you included on the works cited page of your prospectus.

What is an annotated bibliography?

An **annotated bibliography** is a list of citations to books, articles, and documents. Each **citation** is followed by a brief descriptive and evaluative paragraph, called the **annotation**. The purpose of the **annotation** is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited.

Why write an annotated bibliography?

In almost every academic discipline, scholars write and refer to annotated bibliographies in order to organize and orient their research. Scholars frequently use annotated bibliographies written by other scholars in order to get an overview of the topic they are researching and to locate sources that are actually relevant to their specific research topic, thesis, and/or questions. In many ways, annotated bibliographies are time saving tools. Instead of reading hundreds of books—90% of which a scholar might not need for her research—a researcher can simply read annotations that will **concisely** summarize what various texts say (and how), and whether those texts might be worth reading in their entirety.

Annotated bibliographies are also used in order to organize large quantities of information into a single document that succinctly surveys the historical conversation around a particular academic interest. Scholars produce annotated bibliographies not only for other scholars, but also for themselves, in order to get a handle on all the various information that they've collected. By writing annotated bibliographies, a scholar can figure out how most strategically to use the information they've collected throughout their research, as well as how to situation their own work into the larger scholarly conversation. For example, scholars want to produce work that offers their fields something new. An annotated bibliography is a good way to track what has already been said and then figure out what still needs to be addressed.

Elements of an annotated bibliography:

- A statement of scope that acts as an introductory statement to explain what topic you are covering and the context for your inquiry.
- Format according to the appropriate citation style (MLA for our class)
- Each source has its own annotation
- Each annotation contains a **summary** or explanation of the work's main points and/or purpose of the work—basically, its claims—which shows among other things that you have read and thoroughly understand the source
- Each annotation also contains some **rhetorical analysis** or verification or critique of the argument as well as the authority or qualifications of the author—who is the author and what are her qualifications? Are they a leader in the field? A doctoral student? Is this source commonly cited or is it obscure (you can often verify this through Google scholar)? What is the point of view or perspective from which the work was written? For instance, you may note whether the author seemed to have particular biases or was trying to reach a particular audience
- Each annotation also includes some sort of **synthesis** by commenting on the worth, effectiveness, and usefulness of the work in terms of your own research project. How does this work impact your research? How might you use it to make your own argument? You may also want to make relevant connections between this work and other works on your list (compare/contrast). Is it an extension of the argument made in another, previously published piece you are using? Is it a strong

counterargument to something else on your list? Is it better used for background information than for helping you make your argument?

A good annotated bibliography:

- A concise, specific, and focused statement of scope
- Encourages you to think critically about the content of the works you are using, their place within a field of study, and their relation to your own research and ideas
- Proves you have read and understand your sources
- Establishes your work as a valid source and you as a competent researcher
- Situates your study and topic in a continuing professional conversation
- Provides a way for others to decide whether a source will be helpful to their research if they read it
- Could help interested researchers determine whether they are interested in a topic by providing background information and an idea of the kind of work going on in a field
- Includes concise and precise annotations

Form and Audience:

For this class, your annotated bibliography should be organized in paragraph form (one or two paragraphs per entry, roughly 150 to 200 words, depending). The audience is an academic one that is interested in the same topic as you and might want to know more about your sources. You are providing a succinct summary and evaluation for them. The rhetorical choices you make in your annotations should make your audience clear.

[Source: http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/annotated_bibliographies.html]

SPECIFICATIONS:

A statement of scope

Four bibliographic entries

At least two scholarly sources

MLA formatting and citation

Any paper that does not meet these specifications will not be accepted.

Due Date: Post to Canvas by 11:59 PM, Friday, May 15

Major Project 2: Academic Research Paper

For your final major project, you will write a five to seven page academic research paper on a topic of your choice. Your research paper must make a complex claim that is supported through evidence that you cull from at least four sources, two of which must be scholarly sources.

Purpose:

Even if you don't choose a major in which you are constantly writing research papers, you will most certainly be asked to do copious amounts of research that you will then need to assimilate into some formal presentation (lab reports, exams, oral presentations) that shows your professors that you know what you are talking about. To that end, this project is intended to help you develop the skills you need to be a good researcher.

A good researcher is someone who knows how to:

- Ask the right questions to motivate her/his research
- Efficiently seek out the right sources from which to find the necessary information to answer those questions
- Effectively and critically read those sources in order to assimilate that information into a concise, complex, and clear argument that has an evident claim with real stakes and can express to their audience that they have a good handle on their research topic

The other purpose of this research paper is to give you all the chance to explore areas that you might be considering as potential majors. This is a great chance to check out what it really means to major in something like economics or foreign policy or public health. Not only will you be able to practice skills crucial to your success in college, but you can also see whether or not biomedical or literary research is something you can imagine yourself doing. You can't really know what you want to do until you do it: so here's your chance.

What your research paper must include:

- A complex, arguable claim that has real stakes for your chosen field. To that end: be sure that you pick a topic that is truly relevant to the scholarly field you've chosen. Is this something that scholars are actually talking about? As opposed to your first major project, you don't want to argue for either/or of a debate, but you want to make a more nuanced claim about how or why something is the way it is.
- A well-organized argument with clear supporting points and a roadmap that tells your reader how you lay out your argument
- Relevant evidence that you've synthesized from various sources and then adapted to make your own argument. You want to use good, illustrative quotes, relevant data and statistics, and clear paraphrases of points that work as examples that prove the point you are trying to make
- At least one counterargument
- A works cited page with four sources, two of which are scholarly, and all of which are used to make your own argument
- As in the case of your prospectus and annotated bibliography, the rhetorical choices you make should speak to the intended academic audience you are targeting.

SPECIFICATIONS

- 5 to 7 pages, MLA formatting and citations
- Four sources, at least two of which are scholarly

Due Date: Post to Canvas by 11:59 PM, Tuesday, May 26