

**WRITING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL**  
**in CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY**  
(These guidelines are also applicable to sociology and archaeology)  
Gettysburg College

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***Sections to Include***

**Title:** Your title should be concise. It can be divided into two sections before and after a colon (:). Rather than being cute or witty, you should aim to include all or most of the key words that pertain to your proposed research.

**Research Objectives:** This section, which should be one or two paragraphs, will outline what research question you wish to examine. What issue will you be looking at, and why is this important? Clarify the purpose and rationale for your research, focusing mainly on the research question rather than on the site or the people you wish to study (although you may certainly mention these, be brief and do not devote a long stretch of time to explaining the details of where and who you will study since you will do this in the “Methods” section)

**Literature Review:** This section should contain a more in-depth explanation of your **research objectives** by contextualizing it within a body of scholarly literature. In a more detailed fashion, explain what you want to do and why. Given what has already been written on the topic, why is your research important? What will it contribute to our knowledge, within the discipline of anthropology or within another field of scholarly interest? To answer these questions you must place your research within a theoretical and conceptual framework and review the work of other scholars. In your discussion, make sure to outline the theories that are most important to you, and discuss how other anthropologists or scholars have investigated this or similar issues. Understanding your theoretical and conceptual framework will require a lot of thought, so don't whip this part out in one night! Take time to think about how your research will complement or context extant scholarly writings.

**Methodology:** This section should answer the questions of *where, who, how, and when*: 1) where will your field site be? 2) What "community" will you be working with? 3) What methods will you use to investigate the problem you have posed? 4) What schedule do you plan to follow to accomplish all of your goals? This should be the longest section, and you may go into great detail. Make sure you think through the issues raised in Chapter 14 (“Planning a Community Study”) of the Crane and Angrosino book and Chapter 6 of the DeWalt book (“Designing Research with Participant Observers”).

1) where will your field site be? Describe the place/places you would like to conduct research and offer important information regarding its geography, population (if relevant), and social composition. If you will be doing multi-sited ethnography, discuss your plans on dividing up time between the sites. How will you get to the fieldsite(s), and how feasible is it to travel there?

2) What "community" will you be working with? What efforts have you made or will you make to contact these people and get to know them, and/or do you have previous experience working with or spending time in this community? Discuss the community’s distinctiveness, homo- or hetero-geneity, and its social or geographic boundaries. If you wish to conduct your research on campus rather than exploring another social domain, legitimize your choice.

3) What methods will you use to investigate the problem you have posed? Discuss your research procedures in down-to-earth, precise terms, mentioning the specific anthropological methods that you plan to employ: participant observation; interviews; life histories; surveys (objective data that can be

tabulated); kinship charts; archival work; photographs; film; and any other strategies for collecting information. Why are these methods most appropriate? What possible constraints or problems may you encounter? If you are conducting interviews, will these interviews be audio-taped or not? what criteria will you use in selecting interviewees or survey participants, and how many do you plan to talk to? If you are doing participant observation, how frequently will you be able to participate and record your observations? How do you plan to organize your field data: will you keep a field log? Will it be written by hand or typed on a computer?

4) What schedule do you plan to follow to accomplish all of your goals? The Methodology section should end with a time-table that outlines when you intend to complete each step of your research. Make sure to include approximate dates on when you will be present at your field site, when plan to conduct interview and/or surveys, etc.

**Ethical Considerations:** A paragraph on ethical considerations must be included if your research will entail participant-observation, interviewing, or surveying of people. A copy of the AAA Guidelines on ethics will prove to be very useful, so please review it along with research notes from class. The two most critical ethical considerations are: 1) **Informed consent:** how will you obtain it? Be specific! 2) **Confidentiality:** how will you ensure it? You should also ensure readers that no harm will occur to your subjects as a result of their participation in your study, and that any "risks" of participating in this research are minimal. In the "Ethical Considerations" section of your proposal, point out that you have read and signed the Department of Anthropology's Ethics contract that outlines proper ethical procedures for undergraduate students in anthropology.

**\*no longer relevant since you will be submitting a form to the IRB (Institutional Review Board) that reviews the ethical implications of your proposed research**

**Personal Rationale:** This paragraph discusses why you are interested in this problem, what courses and/or experiences you have had that prepare you to undertake this research, and what you think you will gain, in terms of personal growth, from this experience.

**Bibliography:** This should include the sources you have or should consult, which link up with your Research Objectives and Literature Review. In addition, all references cited in earlier sections of the proposal should be included in the Bibliography. You should use the American Anthropological Association Style Guide for information on how to format in-text citations and your Bibliography. Using RefWorks will help you to organize and output the literature in your bibliography.

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### **Sources**

Crane, Julia G., and Michael V. Angrosino  
1992 *Field Projects in Anthropology: A Student Handbook*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

DeWalt, Kathleen M., and Billie R. DeWalt  
2002 *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*. Walnut Creek, Lanham, New York, and Oxford: Altamira Press.