**In general your proposal should include the following sections:**

**I.  Introduction**

In the real world of higher education, a research proposal is most often written by scholars seeking grant funding for a research project or it's the first step in getting approval to write a doctoral dissertation. Even if this is just a course assignment, treat your introduction as the initial pitch of an idea. After reading the introduction, your readers should not only have an understanding of what you want to do, but they should also be able to sense your passion for the topic and be excited about the study's possible outcomes.

**Think about your introduction as a narrative written in one to three paragraphs that succinctly answers the following four questions**:

1. What is the central research problem?
2. What is the topic of study related to that problem?
3. What methods should be used to analyze the research problem?
4. Why is this important research, and why should someone reading the proposal care about the outcomes from the study?

**II.  Background and Significance**

This section can be melded into your introduction or you can create a separate section to help with the organization and flow of your proposal. This is where you explain the context of your study proposal and outline why it's important. Approach writing this section with the thought that you can’t assume your readers will know as much about the research problem as you do. Note that this section is not an essay going over everything you have learned about the research problem; instead, you must choose what is relevant to help explain the goals for your study.

**To that end, while there are no hard and fast rules, you should attempt to deal with some or all of the following:**

* State the research problem and give a more detailed explanation about the purpose of the study than what you stated in the introduction. This is particularly important if the problem is complex or multifaceted.
* Present the rationale of your proposed study and clearly indicate why it is worth doing. Answer the "So What? question [i.e., why should anyone care].
* Describe the major issues or problems to be addressed by your research.
* Set the boundaries of your proposed research in order to provide a clear focus.
* If necessary, provide definitions of key concepts or terms.

**III.  Literature Review**

**Connected to the background and significance of your study is a more deliberate review and synthesis of prior studies related to the research problem under investigation**. The purpose here is to place your project within the larger whole of what is currently being explored, while demonstrating to your readers that your work is original and innovative. Since a literature review is information dense, it is crucial that this section is intelligently structured to enable a reader to grasp the key arguments underpinning your study in relation to that of other researchers. A good strategy is to break the literature into "conceptual categories" [themes] rather than systematically describing groups of materials one at a time.

**To help frame your proposal's literature review, here are the "five C’s" of writing a literature review:**

1. **Cite**: keep the primary focus on the literature pertinent to your research problem.
2. **Compare** the various arguments, theories, methodologies, and findings expressed in the literature: what do the authors agree on? Who applies similar approaches to analyzing the research problem?
3. **Contrast** the various arguments, themes, approaches and controversies expressed in the literature: what are the major areas of disagreement, controversy, or debate?
4. **Critique** the literature: Which arguments are more persuasive, and why? Which approaches, findings, methodologies seem most reliable, valid, or appropriate, and why? Pay attention to the verbs you use to describe what an author says/does [e.g., asserts, demonstrates, etc.].
5. **Connect** the literature to your own area of research and investigation: how does your own work draw upon, depart from, or synthesize what has been said in the literature?

**1V.  Preliminary Suppositions and Implications**

**Just because you don't have to actually conduct the study and analyze the results, this doesn't mean that you can skip talking about the analytical process and potential implications**. The purpose of this section is to argue how and in what ways you believe your research will refine, revise, or extend existing knowledge in the subject area under investigation. Depending on the aims and objectives of your study, describe how the anticipated results of your study will impact future scholarly research, theory, practice, forms of interventions, or policy. Note that such discussions may have either substantive [a potential new policy], theoretical [a potential new understanding], or methodological [a potential new way of analyzing] significance.  
   
**When thinking about the potential implications of your study, ask the following questions:**

* What might the results mean in regards to the theoretical framework that underpins the study?
* What suggestions for subsequent research could arise from the potential outcomes of the study?
* What will the results mean to practitioners in the natural settings of their workplace?
* Will the results influence programs, methods, and/or forms of intervention?
* How might the results contribute to the solution of social, economic, or other types of problems?
* Will the results influence policy decisions?
* In what way do individuals or groups benefit should your study be pursued?
* How will the results of the study be implemented, and what innovations will come about?

**V.  Conclusion**

**The conclusion reiterates the importance or significance of your proposal and provides a brief summary of the entire study**. This section should be only one or two paragraphs long, emphasizing why the research problem is worth investigating, why your research study is unique, and how it advances knowledge.

**Someone reading this section should come away with an understanding of:**

* Why the study was done,
* The specific purpose of the study and the research questions it attempted to answer,
* The potential implications emerging from your proposed study of the research problem, and

**VI.  Citations**

As with any scholarly research paper, you must cite the sources you used in composing your proposal. In a standard research proposal, this section can take two forms, so consult with your professor about which one is preferred.

1. **References --**lists only the literature that you actually used or cited in your proposal.
2. **Bibliography --**lists everything you used or cited in your proposal with additional citations to any key sources relevant to understanding the research problem.

In either case, this section should testify to the fact that you did enough preparatory work to make sure the project will complement and not duplicate the efforts of other researchers. Start a new page and use the heading "References" or "Bibliography" centered at the top of the page. Cited works should always use a standard format that follows the writing style advised by the discipline of your course, that is AMA or APA