



Writing Guidelines: Sustainability and Innovation (Proposal)

Prompt

How will our actions today impact our children and grandchildren? What world will a child 100 years from now live in? It is hard to predict precisely the environmental threats future generations will face, but we know more now than ever before about the long-term effects of our carbon footprint. The good news is that we also have more tools to work with—technology, education, global communication—that we can apply to the problem.

In a 600-1,000 proposal, offer your own sustainability innovation for a problem faced by your community. What solution—large or small—can you design to help your family/school/neighborhood/town/city meet its current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own? How will this innovation help to sustain life on earth, in all of its forms?

Proposal, Defined

What exactly is a “proposal”, you might be wondering. Proposals are used throughout the professional and academic world to apply for a grant, help get a project funded, or, in this case, it’s the form best suited to introduce a new idea to a global audience. In short, a proposal outlines a problem and then offers a solution. Your job is to persuade your readers that this issue is worth their attention, while also convincing them that *your* solution is the appropriate course of action.

Possible Topics

- **Transportation:** How might we reduce our carbon footprint while also improving air quality? [Example solutions: replacing your town’s diesel school buses with electric alternatives, creating an incentives program for walking or biking to school and/or work]



- **School:** How could schools and universities implement more sustainable practices? [Example solutions: requiring all students at your high school to take an environmental studies class; outlining a net zero emissions plan for the university in your city]
- **Home:** How can families and communities lessen their domestic impacts? [Example solutions: replacing all CFL lightbulbs in your neighborhood, developing a communal solar array for your city block]
- **Food:** How can we grow, harvest, transport, eat, and dispose of food most efficiently? [Example solutions: starting a composting program at your school; subsidizing the cost of locally produced food]

Guiding Ideas

- **BRAINSTORM.** In a notebook or blank document, jot down ideas about your topic. Don't worry about your proposal or writing full sentences, just get your thoughts down: Why is this sustainability issue important in *your* community? Why do *you* care about it? Why should *others* care about it? What are possible solutions? What are barriers to success? How can those barriers be addressed?
- **RESEARCH.** Now that you've generated a collection of ideas, see what info already exists out there that might help flesh out your thoughts. Search the databases of prominent newspapers, explore [google scholar](#), see if local or national radio stories have covered this issue, check in with your local librarian.
- **START WITH A HOOK.** Capture your reader's attention from the beginning! What can you start with that will compel your audience to pay attention? Perhaps an anecdote or a surprising fact?
- **DEFINE YOUR SUSTAINABILITY ISSUE.** What is the problem at hand? Why should people care? What are the stakes? What will inaction lead to?
- **PROVIDE CONTEXT.** Have others tried to address this problem before? Were those solutions successful?
- **YOUR SOLUTION!** What new idea are you bringing to the table to address this problem? Make sure your proposed solution is as specific as possible. (Who will be involved? How



long will it take? How will you get support and buy-in from the community?) And make sure to clearly state your objective—what outcome are you hoping to achieve?

- **BACK UP YOUR IDEAS.** Once you have a sense of what you want to say, start collecting evidence. Look at the existing research on your topic, find persuasive quotes from reputable sources, and/or identify experiences from your own life (or anecdotes from people you know) that demonstrate the validity of your perspective.
- **MAKE IT UNIVERSAL:** As you outline your proposal, keep in mind that your goal is to persuade your audience to listen up. Sometimes, the most compelling proposals are both personal and universal. You might share an experience from your life that supports your solution, while also explaining (or showing through examples) how this topic impacts people on a broader scale.
- **GIVE CREDIT WHERE CREDIT'S DUE:** Don't forget to cite your sources.