Purpose:
This portion of your research proposal should serve three purposes: 1) it should make your reader want to know more about your topic, 2) it should give your reader an understanding about the purpose and need for your research, and 3) it should make clear for your reader exactly what you want to know, or which direction your research is going to take.

This assignment also serves as my first opportunity to evaluate your academic, formal writing. As such, you should take care to do your best. Content and ideas matter most, but I cannot reward brilliant content if I cannot find it, thanks to multiple mechanical errors and ineffective style.

Content:
As described in Section 6.2.2 of the Chicago manual (p. 64), the eventual introduction (we’ll call it the Final Introduction to keep things clear) to your research project will have five parts: 1) attention material, 2) a review of the literature, 3) a statement of purpose, 4) your research question, and 5) your thesis/hypothesis. For the Introduction/Purpose/RQ assignment, we are only concerned with the first, third, and fourth parts listed here.

Introduction (Attention Material): Imagine that you have to describe your research to someone who is intelligent and familiar with the conventions of academic research, but not your specific area. How can you get that person to keep reading? Perhaps you could think about the moment when YOUR interest in the topic began. Can you create that spark of interest in your reader? She/he should get some sense of the importance of your topic, and the unique aspects within it. Remember, this is a working introduction, and you will have opportunities to add to or edit this section later.

Purpose Statement: Now imagine that, after your attention material, you have written a beautiful and brilliant literature review. The next part of your Final Introduction will be a statement of purpose, which should be a link between the literature you just reviewed and why you feel the need to add to that literature. You can view the topic for your second response essay (“I am working on the topic of _____ because I want to find out _____ so that I can help others understand ______.”) as the basic frame for your purpose statement. Again, this part of your Final Introduction will likely change as you uncover more about the literature and move closer to your final thesis/hypothesis.

Research Question: As described on p. 103 of the Chicago manual, the research question is usually a statement about what is not yet known or understood about your topic or what holes you are aiming to fill, followed by a but or however to set up the question. The research question is a narrowing of your purpose statement. Your reader should also have some sense of the significance of your question (the So what?).

Details:
- Page limit: 2 – 3 pages, double spaced (this limit is VERY loose)
- Margins: Microsoft Word default of 1.25” left and right, 1” top and bottom
- Submission: Hard copy or email is fine
- References: Most of the information in this part of the assignment will not need citation. If you do need to cite, please follow Chicago style.
McNair Scholars Program – Spring 2009

Research Proposal Segment One – Introduction, Purpose Statement, RQ

Helpful hints:

- Avoid contractions (isn’t, don’t, I’m, you’re)
- Avoid casual language when possible (use children instead of kids)
- Spell out any acronyms the first time you use them (NBC = National Broadcasting Company)
- Avoid misuse of homonyms (there and their and they’re, weather and whether)
- Avoid misuse of closely related words (accept and except, then and than, woman and women, affect and effect, farther and further)
- Avoid misuse of author’s name (first and last name for the first time an author is mentioned; only last name thereafter)
- Be clear about semi-colon use: the semi-colon is used for a full stop (like a period) and to tie two closely related independent clauses (sentences) together. The word “however” should usually be preceded by a semi-colon.
- Avoid misuse of quotation marks (for colloquialisms…take the “finger quotes” test) and quotations (length and timing)
- Avoid inappropriate informality: Research papers are formal writing situations. Avoid colloquialisms (use “advertisement” over “ad” and “television” over “TV”).
- Consider audience ignorance: What do you know about the audience who will be reading your paper? What do you have to explain and what can you assume?
- Avoid inappropriate tense shifts (“She wrote her first paper about Star Trek and uses close textual analysis as her method.”)
- Cut formulaic phrases, otherwise known as space wasters (“in this day and age/in today’s society,” “due to the fact that,” “have the ability to,” “last but not least,” “concerning the matter of”). Instead, use concise expressions (now, because, can, finally, and about, respectively).
- Avoid gender-biased language (forefathers, chairman, cameraman, mankind, etc.)
- Avoid noun/pronoun disagreement in number (singular nouns require singular pronouns…again, watch for gender bias…when in doubt, use all plurals)
- Avoid words that are not really words: alright (should be all right), alot (should be a lot), conversate (should be converse), irregardless (should be regardless). No matter how many times you’ve heard it, it’s still wrong.
- Avoid “Try and”: Try to remember that try and is wrong.
- Reconsider “Thing”: Yikes. I promise you, you CAN find a better word for what you mean.
- Reconsider This/That/These/Those: These words cannot stand alone…they are not nouns. Assume I don’t know what “this” should be referring to. For example, saying “This is why I’m hot” makes me ask “What is why you’re hot?” Don’t make me ask. Just tell me.
McNair Scholars Program – Spring 2009

Research Proposal Segment One – Introduction, Purpose Statement, RQ

- Avoid passive voice (“Our writing styles will be checked by the professor” instead of “The professor will check our writing styles” … ask yourself who is doing what to fix passive voice). Active voice gives your writing life and energy, while passive voice makes you seem indecisive or wordy.

- Avoid pointless quotations: There are only two times when you should use a direct quotation. The first time is when the person you are quoting is very important and well respected. The second time is when the way the author phrases her/his statement is so perfect that you wouldn’t dare change it or not include it. At all other times, you should paraphrase…write about how YOU understand what the author said.

- Avoid general wishy-washyness: seem, think, believe

- Don’t ignore the easiest trick in the book: If you are not sure, change it to a word or phrase with which you feel most comfortable (surprise becomes shock, lay/lie becomes place/rest)

Note: The only way to receive no credit on this assignment is to not submit a paper.