Sections 1–4 in a research proposal are usually written last—that is, after you have completed the other eight sections (Sections 5–12). However, they are presented first in our book so that you can jot down some initial ideas and revise these sections as your proposal develops over time.

Note that the first three sections of a research proposal are called the “Front Matter.” The fourth section actually begins the “guts” of your research proposal.
Your proposal’s title will change many times as you write the remaining sections of your research proposal. Think of your title as “a working title.” So be prepared to change your title as time goes on.

When writing your title, reexamine your research purposes, questions, or hypotheses to identify your main variables. These should be referred to in your title. The example below shows the purpose of a simple social work research proposal and a suggested corresponding title:

Example:

Research purpose: The purpose of this research study is to explore the relationship between administrative styles of social work supervisors and the effectiveness and efficiency of their supervisees.

Corresponding title: The Relationship between the Administrative Styles of Social Work Supervisors and the Effectiveness and Efficiency of Their Supervisees

After you have successfully completed your research study you will need to disseminate your study’s findings by submitting a manuscript for possible publication to a professional social work journal. The title of your research proposal
will be very similar—if not exact—to the title of the manuscript you finally submit for possible publication.

### Tips for Writing a Title Page

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Tips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Check to see if your research instructor (or funding agency you have in mind) has any specifications for your Title/Cover Page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Check to be sure you included the names of key people who will be affiliated with your project. Usually the Title/Cover Page includes the people who will be involved in your proposed research study (e.g., Department Head, your research supervisor, your research instructor, Contracts Officer, Executive Director of the social work agency that your study will take place). Thus, if your proposed research study involves collaboration with other groups/organizations, it's a good idea to include their names on your Title/Cover Page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Check to see if your Title Page looks professional and neat. However, do not waste time using fancy report covers, expensive binding, or other procedures that may send the wrong message to your potential funding agency. You are trying to impress them with how you really need funding, not the message that you do things rather expensively!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Check with your research instructor to see if he/she has any examples of title pages from other research proposals to show you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Tips for Writing a Title**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>#</th>
<th>Tips</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Check to see if the title of your study is comprehensive enough to clearly indicate the nature of your proposed project. Your title should make sense standing all by itself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Check to see if your title is logical, brief, and descriptive. It should not contain more than 20 words—the shorter the better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Check to see if your title contains the important variables that you propose to study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Check to see that your title is not a sentence and does not end with a period. If your title is getting too long, try removing some words. When all else fails, try using a two-part title with the parts separated by a colon (use only as a last resort!).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Check to see if you avoided the temptation to put the anticipated results of your study in the title.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Check to see if your title is concise and unambiguous. Resist trying to make it “cute.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Check to see if your title contains specific, familiar, and short words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Check to see if your title is understandable and jargon-free.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Section 1: Title Page and Title

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Check to see if your title paints a quick overall picture of the key idea(s) that you propose to study.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Check to see if your title mentions the sample or population (research participants) you wish to study.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Check to see that your title does not contain abbreviations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Check to see that your title contains the correct syntax (word order). The words you use in your title should clearly reflect the focus of your proposal. The most important words should come first, then the least important words. Try to remove words from your title that really are not necessary for understanding.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Check with your research instructor to see if he/she has any examples of titles from other research proposals to show you.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Write a tentative title for your research proposal in the white space provided below. The box will expand as you type.

• Use all the tips in this section to write your title (e.g., be sure it’s not a sentence and doesn’t end with a period).
• If possible, show your title to your classmates for their feedback.
• Revise your title based on your classmates’ feedback.
• Submit your title to your instructor for comments.

NOTE: As you know, you won’t write the final version of your title until after you have completed Sections 5–12 of your research proposal. Thus, it is important for you to remember that at this point in the proposal-writing process, your title should be considered a draft, which will transform into a masterpiece as your proposal develops over the semester.

Your Name(s): 

Your Identification Number(s) (if any): 

Type your tentative Title section here. 
(Box will automatically expand as you type)
Potential funders use abstracts to make initial decisions about whether they are interested in providing financial support for the proposals they receive. Reviewers, who usually read a high number of proposals, obtain their initial impressions by reading abstracts, thereby making abstracts a significant aspect of the review process.

An abstract is a summary that provides an overview of the proposal. When there are many competing proposals (such as for research funding), preparing a good abstract is exceedingly important because some reviewers may eliminate certain proposals based on their abstracts alone. For instance, if the funding agency is concentrating on pregnant adolescents and your abstract fails to mention this group, it may not get further consideration.

Generally, your abstract synthesizes the body of your proposal. While limiting the maximum number of words to between 200 and 250, you must clearly and concisely state your research question (or hypothesis), outline the means you’ll use to answer that question (or test your hypothesis), and indicate your anticipated results and their significance to the social work profession. Just as we mentioned in the section about your title page (Section 1), your abstract will be refined over time and will be finally written after Sections 5–12 have been fully completed.

For many academic purposes (such as a term project), a short abstract (say, 200–250 words) is adequate. You should check your institution or instructor’s
requirements regarding your abstract’s length. Use the following four subheadings if you are writing a short abstract:

**Short Abstract**

1. **Purpose (or objective) of the study.** The material for this subheading can be found in Section 7: Research Question.

2. **Method(s) used to gather the data.** The material for this subheading can be found in Section 8d: Data Collection.

3. **Projected results.** The material for this subheading can be found in Section 8e: Data Analysis.

4. **Implications of projected results.** The material for this subheading can be found in Section 10: Significance.

 Longer abstracts simply need numerous subheadings to guide readers such as:

**Long Abstract**

1. **Problem area** (including importance). The material for this subheading can be found in Section 6: Problem.

2. **Research purpose** (or question or hypothesis). The material for this subheading can be found in Section 7: Research Question.

3. **Related literature** (brief overview of most salient aspects). The material for this subheading can be found in Section 5: Literature Review.

4. **Research participants** (including sampling plan). The material for this subheading can be found in Section 8b: Sample.

5. **Instrumentation** (types of instruments that will be used; names of instruments are usually not needed in the abstract). The material for this subheading can be found in Section 8c: Instrumentation.

6. **Methods of data collection.** The material for this subheading can be found in Section 8d: Data Collection.

7. **Method of data analysis** (descriptive and inferential, if any, or type of qualitative analysis). The material for this subheading can be found in Section 8e: Data Analysis.

8. **Potential implications.** The material for this subheading can be found in Section 10: Implications.
## Tips for Writing an Abstract

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Tips</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Check to see that your abstract does not exceed 250 words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Check to see if you clearly and concisely stated the <strong>purpose (or objective)</strong> of your study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Check to see if you clearly and concisely stated the <strong>method</strong> of your study; that is, check to see if you clearly and concisely stated how you are going to answer your research question (or test your hypothesis).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Check to see if you clearly and concisely stated the anticipated <strong>results</strong> of your study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Check to see if you clearly and concisely delineated the significance of your expected results; that is, how are your anticipated results going to be useful to social work practitioners, administrators, policy makers, or educators?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Check to see that you included “key words” at the bottom of your abstract.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Check to see that you clearly defined all abbreviations (except units of measurements), acronyms, and unique terms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 2: Abstract

25 | Yes No | Check to see that your abstract reports accurate information that is in the body of the accompanying proposal.

26 | Yes No | Check to see if your abstract is extraordinarily clear to the common reader. Do not try to impress your friends with fancy words.

27 | Yes No | Check to see if you included enough relevant material to provide the ingredients that are needed for all four criteria that are usually required for abstracts that appear in professional social work journal articles: (1) purpose, (2) method, (3) results, and (4) implications.

28 | Yes No | Check to see if you wrote your abstract in the future tense.

29 | Yes No | Check with your research instructor to see if he/she has any examples of proposal abstracts to show you.

After you have successfully completed your research study, you will need to disseminate your study’s findings by submitting a manuscript for possible publication to a professional social work journal. The abstract of your research proposal should be very similar to the abstract of the manuscript you submit for possible publication.

Boxes 2.1 and 2.2 provide two examples of abstracts for articles that appeared in a professional social work journal. Note how the contents of the published abstracts are very similar to the ones for research proposals. The major difference between the two is that abstracts for research proposals are written in the future tense whereas abstracts for manuscripts that are submitted for possible publication are written in the present tense, as illustrated in Box 2.2. However, once in a while you will see published abstracts written in past tense, as demonstrated in Boxes 2.1 and 2.2.
BOX 2.1

Example of an Abstract from an Article That Appeared in a Professional Journal

Evaluating Culturally Responsive Group Work with Black Women

Purpose: This study examined the efficacy of a culturally congruent group treatment model, entitled "Claiming Your Connections" (CYC) aimed at reducing depressive symptoms and perceived stress, and enhancing psychosocial competence (i.e., locus of control and active coping) among Black women. Method: A total of 58 Black women recruited from health and human service community-based organizations were randomly assigned to either the CYC intervention or a wait-list control group. Women in the CYC program attended weekly group intervention sessions over a 10-week period, and the wait-list control group did not receive any treatment for the same duration. Results: At pretreatment both groups indicated moderate levels of depressive symptoms, perceived stress, and psychosocial competence. After the intervention, the CYC group reported a significant reduction in depressive symptoms and perceived stress. There was no statistically significant change on these variables for the control group. Implications: Results suggest that the CYC group intervention program is effective with Black women who report difficulty managing stressors of daily life.

BOX 2.2

Example of an Abstract from an Article That Appeared in a Professional Journal

**Therapist Effects on Disparities Experienced by Minorities Receiving Services for Mental Illness**

**Objectives:** The authors examine if some of the reason clients from racial and ethnic minority groups experience outcome disparities is explained by their therapists. **Method:** Data from 98 clients (19% minority) and 14 therapists at two community mental health agencies where clients from racial and ethnic minority groups were experiencing outcome disparities were analyzed using hierarchical linear modeling with treatment outcomes at Level 1, client factors at Level 2, and therapists at Level 3. **Results:** There were substantial therapist effects that moderated the relationship between clients’ race and treatment outcomes (outcome disparities). Therapists accounted for 28.7% of the variability in outcome disparities. **Conclusions:** Therapists are linked to outcome disparities and appear to play a substantial role in why disparities occur.

---

Box 2.1 presents an abstract from a social work journal article. Download and read the article. Now that you are familiar with the research study depicted in Box 2.1:

In the white space below, write a short hypothetical abstract you feel the authors should have written for the research proposal their study was based upon. The box will expand as you type.

**NOTE:** You do not have a copy of the authors’ research proposal. You only have a copy of the article that resulted from the implementation of their proposal. Your main objective is to edit, revise, rearrange, and/or modify the authors’ published abstract as you think it should have appeared in their research proposal.

- Use all the tips in this section to write your hypothetical proposal abstract (i.e., contains four subsections, written in future tense).
- Submit your revised Abstract section to your instructor, pointing out all the revisions you made and why you made them.

Your Name(s):

Your Identification Number(s) (if any):

Assignment 2.1

Type your short Abstract section here. (Box will automatically expand as you type)
Box 2.2 presents an abstract from a social work journal article. Download and read the article. Now that you are familiar with the research study depicted in Box 2.2:

In the white space below, write a short hypothetical abstract you feel the authors should have written for the research proposal their study was based upon. The box will expand as you type.

**NOTE:** You do not have a copy of the authors’ research proposal. You only have a copy of the article that resulted from the implementation of their proposal. Your main objective is to edit, revise, rearrange, and/or modify the authors’ published abstract as you think it should have appeared in their research proposal.

- Use all the tips in this section to write your hypothetical proposal abstract (e.g., contains four subsections, written in future tense).
- Submit your revised Abstract section to your instructor, pointing out all the revisions you made and why you made them.

Your Name(s):  
Your Identification Number(s) (if any):  
Assignment 2.2

Type your short Abstract section here.  
(Box will automatically expand as you type)
Box 2.1 presents an abstract from a social work journal article. Download and read the article. Now that you are familiar with the research study depicted in Box 2.1:

In the white space below, write a long hypothetical abstract you feel the authors should have written for the research proposal their study was based upon. The box will expand as you type.

**NOTE:** You do not have a copy of the authors’ research proposal. You only have a copy of the article that resulted from the implementation of their proposal. Your main objective is to edit, revise, rearrange, and/or modify the authors’ published abstract as you think it should have appeared in their research proposal.

- Use all the tips in this section to write your hypothetical proposal abstract (i.e., contains four subsections, written in future tense).
- Submit your revised Abstract section to your instructor, pointing out all the revisions you made and why you made them.

Your Name(s):

Your Identification Number(s) (if any):

Assignment 2.3

Type your long Abstract section here. (Box will automatically expand as you type)
Box 2.2 presents an abstract from a social work journal article. Download and read the article. Now that you are familiar with the research study depicted in Box 2.2:

In the white space below, write a long hypothetical abstract you feel the authors should have written for the research proposal their study was based upon. The box will expand as you type.

**NOTE:** You do not have a copy of the authors' research proposal. You only have a copy of the article that resulted from the implementation of their proposal. Your main objective is to edit, revise, rearrange, and/or modify the authors' published abstract as you think it should have appeared in their research proposal.

- Use all the tips in this section to write your hypothetical proposal abstract (i.e., contains four subsections, written in future tense).
- Submit your revised Abstract section to your instructor, pointing out all the revisions you made and why you made them.

Your Name(s):
Your Identification Number(s) (if any):
Assignment 2.4

Type your long Abstract section here. (Box will automatically expand as you type)
Section 2
Writing a Short Abstract for Your Research Proposal

Write a short abstract for your research proposal in the white space provided below. The box will expand as you type.

- Use all the tips in this section to write your abstract (e.g., contains four subsections, written in future tense).
- If possible, show your abstract to your classmates for their feedback.
- Revise your abstract based on your classmates' feedback.
- Submit your abstract to your instructor for comments.

**NOTE:** As you know, you will actually write the final version of your abstract after you have completed Sections 5–12 of your research proposal. Thus, it is important for you to remember that at this point in the proposal-writing process your abstract should be considered a draft, which will transform into a masterpiece as your proposal develops over the semester.

Your Name(s):

Identification Number(s) (if any):

Title of Your Research Proposal:

Type your short Abstract section here.
(Box will automatically expand as you type)
A short research proposal with few parts does not need a table of contents. However, a longer and more detailed proposal may require not only a table of contents but a list of illustrations, figures, graphs, and tables as well.

Your Table of Contents section (along with your title and abstract) is finalized after you have completed Sections 4–12. Below is an example of the Table of Contents for a typical social work research proposal:

Title Page and Title
Abstract
Table of Contents
INTRODUCTION
LITERATURE REVIEW
Problem
Research Question
METHOD
Research Design
Sample
Instrumentation
Data Collection
Data Analysis
LIMITATIONS
SIGNIFICANCE
REFERENCES
APPENDIXES