The project proposal is the first main milestone of your research project. It’s also a critical phase of any research project, because it defines what the project will study and how it will be carried out.

The proposal document should have the following sections:

1. **Introduction** section describes the research project in general terms, and then presents a specific research question that will be answered in the project. The introduction should argue for why this question is important and how your project will be new. In other words, why should someone care about this project? How would it add to scientific knowledge? How would (or could) it impact the world? (Note that most projects are not breakthroughs that cure disease or feed the hungry; most projects take small steps towards these and other more modest goals.)

2. **Background** section describes the background information that someone needs to understand your proposal, and to explain how your study connects to existing work that others have done. This is where you should cite some papers (mostly primary sources, probably, but secondary sources are okay too), summarize them briefly, and explain how they relate to your project. Some of these papers may be other studies that answer a research question that is similar but not exactly the same as yours, and others might present techniques that are relevant to your work. If you find papers that are very close to what you propose to do, you should explain why what you plan to do is different.

3. **Research plan** section should describe how you plan to answer your research question. Please make this as specific as possible, but we understand that not all details can be planned ahead of time, and that the plan may change as you begin the project. Please also include a timeline describing what you plan to do during each week of the semester, keeping in mind the project deadlines (see the OnCourse Wiki), and that clearly shows who will be responsible for which tasks. We strongly recommend that you rotate responsibilities among the members of your team, i.e. designate a weekly or biweekly “leader,” and the timeline should indicate who will lead and when.

4. **URL of project website.** Please set up a website for your project, and give us the URL in this section. For now, the website can include a brief description of the research paper topic and your timeline of the research plan. We will ask you to keep the website up-to-date and post brief project summaries throughout the semester, so that your group and the course staff can visit your site at any point in the semester and find out the current status of the project. Feel free to set up a plain HTML website, or to use authoring tools like Google Site, etc.

5. **References.** Please give proper citations for any papers you cite above.

The whole proposal will probably be about 4-5 pages long, although there are not length requirements or restrictions. Feel free to use diagrams or charts, if needed, to enhance your descriptions.