1. **How to think about possible topics:**
   - What do I know really well? Whenever possible, start from a position of strength.
   - What am I really interested in learning about? If you care, it will show.
   - What topics would truly help me develop my longer-term study/professional aspirations?
   - Talk to your professors! Nothing will help you more than critical advice from relevant GW professors about formulating a solid study. Ask for their ideas or if they know colleagues whose work more closely matches your interests. **Once you’ve identified a plausible topic, begin background research.**

2. **What should my research proposal say?**
   The research proposal is your opportunity to share your academic interest and demonstrate your ability to contribute to the conversation. The best research proposals effectively:
   - **Frame the topic** – Clearly identify the parameters (e.g. time period) and central question of your research.
   - **Explain how you’ll do it** – Establish a rough methodology outlining how you will investigate your question.
   - **Convince us that this research matters** – Demonstrate why your topic is important and deserves money and resources to help you carry out your project.

3. **Who can help me with my proposal?** (And yes, you should seek help.)
   - **Your professors**: Of course, your faculty advisor should review the proposal. If you have had other professors who knows the region/country/field of interest to you, ask them to read and critique your proposal.
   - **The Center for Undergraduate Fellowships & Research**
   - **The Writing Center**
   - **Gelman Reference Librarians**

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**How to Structure Your Proposal**

Note: Even if you choose to address things in a different order, these topics should be covered. However, **the proposal should flow as one document rather than a list of the below sections.**

- **Abstract/Introduction**: Start with a brief overview of your project, including who your faculty advisor is, so that readers know what to look for.
- **Context**: Set up the problem you wish to research with brief background information that establishes what the issue is, what aspects of that issue you wish to explore, and why it is significant to do so. **In other words, SO WHAT?** Tell us why you should be selected to explore this particular topic.
- **Guiding questions**: Now that you’ve established context, what will you specifically focus on? What questions do you hope to answer? **Formulating a clearly defined research question is the most important aspect of the proposal.**
- **Methodology**: How will you answer these questions? In **very concrete terms**, discuss the phases of your research, the results you expect to obtain during each phase and why each phase is necessary. What kind of **primary research** will you do? How will the **stipend** help you conduct your research? **This is your opportunity to demonstrate that your project is feasible and that you have a plan.**
- **Qualifications**: Let us know why you know enough to research this topic! What relevant coursework or internships have you completed? Previous research for class or outside of class? How does this proposal build on that research but distinguish itself as new and different? Why have you chosen your faculty advisor?
- **Results**: What do you hope to do with your final paper? Will you seek publication? Follow up with further study? Present this research somewhere?
- **Future plans**: Connect the dots for us! How do this research and this program fit in with your academic/career goals? How will the experience help you get there? What are your future plans?

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The proposal should be a **maximum of two pages double-spaced** and should be reviewed by the faculty advisor. Remember, the selection committee is reading many proposals. The clearer your description of your research question and methodology, your qualifications, and why your research matters, the more likely the selection committee is to support the proposal.