

Common Problems on Proposals

1. Propose something. You can't just talk about what others have done. That is a survey paper, but not a research paper. We use the term "research paper" to mean YOUR research, not someone else's. You must propose something that is new.
2. Ask yourself, "Why hasn't this been done in the past?" If you are proposing something obvious, you need to consider why no one else has thought of it.
3. Ask yourself, "If I run these tests, what am I likely to discover?" As a researcher, you must design experiments which have the most potential for interesting results. Sometimes you are proposing a simulation study in which the results are obvious. You code agents to behave in a certain way, they do, and the results are known as they can be computed mathematically. You don't need to run tests to discover what will happen. For example, in class we discovered that with n bidders with uniform distribution, the bid with the most utility had a given formula. If you run tests with this setup, you are just going to discover the formula is true. You need to do something more interesting. For example, what if the bidder's evaluation changed (based on demand), the bidder learned his behavior (becoming more aggressive based on past success/failure), sniping extended the deadline of the auction, etc. Look to recent papers to get an idea of the kinds of things others are researching.
4. Avoid too many direct quotes – especially for ideas that aren't that unique. For example, I would want to quote the following: Robert Hughes said, "A fair price is the highest one a collector can be induced to pay." [2]

However, I wouldn't need to quote Jeffrey Archer as saying, "I am currently doing about 30 charity auctions a year." Rather, I could say, Some people do many charity auctions a year. In Jeffrey Archer's case, the number is nearly 30 [2].

In both cases, I give credit to the source – I just don't always quote exactly.

5. Use your references throughout the paper. I couldn't say "Some people do many charity auctions a year." without citing a reference UNLESS the fact is generally known. Citing others does the following:
 - a. Gives others credit for their ideas.
 - b. Shows you are NOT claiming the ideas as your own.
 - c. Sets you up as someone who is well-read in the area.

However, if you always cite the same one or two sources, it backfires. People think, "Why should I be reading Olsen's paper? The real authority is Smith. I'll just read that author."