

Selecting a title for the NEA and completing the proposal form.

At the outset, schools may want to give students a free choice of investigations focusing on any of the compulsory or optional content or they may prefer to provide them with a framework, a theme or a range of themes. They may also want to offer a range of locations, and make students aware of any equipment or time constraints. Although it is not acceptable for students to choose from a list of titles or investigations provided by the centre, they may discuss with their teacher fieldwork ideas and research relating to relevant themes in the specification. Following this initial stage students must finalise the focus of their investigation and draft a title. This must be done by each student on his/her own. The proposal form should be written by the student and approved by the teacher before data collection takes place.

Selecting a title

Effective titles will have a locational context and will explicitly link to a key concept, theory or process. The title could be in the form of a question, statement or hypothesis. It should be related to a particular area of the specification, which should be indicated on the proposal form, providing a short justification for the link. In many cases students may want to structure their investigations around 2-3 sub questions or hypotheses, all connected to the central theme as expressed in the title.

If a hypothesis testing approach is adopted, ensure that the hypotheses are capable of being tested against the evidence collected: e.g. 1. Air and ground temperatures will decrease from the city centre to the outer suburbs of under anticyclonic conditions. 2. Wind speed will show great variability but will generally increase from the centre of to the suburbs 3. Relative humidity will vary according to vegetation cover but will generally decrease from the city centre to the suburbs. Other studies may be more suited to the use of sub questions: e.g. 1. What redevelopment has taken place in..... and how has the area changed in land use? 2. How has the redevelopment altered the character of? 3. What types of social conflict have arisen as a result of the redevelopment?

Other factors will determine the choice of title, including accessibility and safety of possible locations, availability of appropriate equipment and resources, opportunities to collect suitable primary and secondary data, manageability in terms of scale, and whether the title allows access to the whole mark scheme.

Pilot studies are useful in assessing the feasibility of the fieldwork. They can be used to confirm whether the investigation would be possible in the chosen location, or if the planned methods of data collection or title need to be adapted. Pilot studies can also be used to test the technique of your planned methods of data collection, for example carrying out a test questionnaire to see if the format is suitable.

Completing the NEA proposal form

Whilst the proposal form varies slightly between the various awarding organisations, very similar headings are used. The proposal is a concise and coherent summary of the planned investigation. It outlines the central issues or questions to be considered, the general area of study within which the research falls. It also demonstrates the independent nature of the investigation, provides a locational context and gives clear indication of appropriate methodologies linked to the chosen theme.

The proposal form will normally include the following information:

1. Investigation title. This should provide a locational and theoretical context for the study.
2. How the title links to the specification content. State the specification code numbers or page references to demonstrate the connection and provide a brief rationale.
3. Planned investigation hypothesis or question/sub-questions. Make sure that these are manageable and achievable. Restrict the number of sub questions/hypotheses to 3 or 4. There is sometimes a tendency to be over ambitious in creating too many separate themes that don't link closely to the title. The study then becomes fragmented and comprises several separate enquiries, or creates an aim or question which is too big and too difficult to manage within the constraints of a 4000 word report.
4. The focus of the investigation. This includes details of the theoretical background in relation to the chosen location(s). Explain why the chosen spatial area has been selected for this investigation.
5. Planned Methodology. In this part of the form there should be clear indication of the techniques to be used in collecting primary and, if relevant, secondary information. Ideally they should be linked to each of the sub questions/hypotheses, stating whether they are qualitative or quantitative methods, and what sampling strategies are to be used in each case. It is important to obtain a fair and representative sample as well as one which can be analysed.
6. Teacher approval for the investigation or details of any necessary amendments that need to be made before approval can be given. It is vital to provide feedback on the proposal form, as this is the main opportunity to provide direction to the student. Although advice can't be too specific, it is a chance to monitor plans for group activity, consider safety and risk, look at the feasibility of the proposal and whether it demonstrates some independence. Note that the proposal form is not an absolute blueprint-it can be a way of managing changes and adaptations within the enquiry. Sometimes hypotheses may be altered as the investigation proceeds, methods may be modified or abandoned, and as long as the essence of the enquiry remains the same, there is no reason why the student shouldn't review the proposal in the light of experience at various stages during the route to enquiry.