Successful capstone projects are not accidents or haphazard occurrences. They result from careful planning and forethought. Projects that are not carefully planned in advance generally produce incomplete or less than desirable results. Students who carefully plan for the Capstone will save time, effort, and money.

A prospectus is a blueprint: a set of written, detailed plans and specifications for conducting a project. The act of preparing and writing a prospectus is a planning process. It requires you to:

1. Clarify the purposes and focus of your work.
2. Anticipate the major difficulties or problems likely to be encountered.
3. Decide which tools and procedures are likely to be most productive in achieving the purposes of the project.
4. Decide which tasks need to be done in what order and by whom.

Like the act of preparing a blueprint, writing a prospectus requires creative thinking. It requires skill in anticipating, conceptualizing, and solving problems. However, creative thinking should not be confused with vague or unclear thinking. Unclear writing usually results from unclear thinking. The solution is more thorough analysis and more precise thinking and rethinking, and more precise diction.

Writing, in the sense of composing and authoring, is a process of thinking and rethinking. Meaningful patterns of words, sentences, and paragraphs do not exist until they are constructed by a human mind. However, the process of writing involves more than just generating ideas. Good writers clarify and refine their thinking as they write. They carefully examine the direction of their thinking and the line of reasoning they have used. They test the meaning of their written expressions against the meaning and intent in their mind. Sometimes they modify what they have written in order to better comply with what they had in mind. But, sometimes examination of what they have written leads them to modify what they had in mind. Hence, the act of writing is a process of shaping and clarifying ideas.

Writing a prospectus is a process of clarifying the problem you wish to address and shaping and refining your plans for solving this problem.

In planning your project you should work closely with your mentor and the other members of your capstone committee. A useful way to begin is to write a two or three page preliminary proposal. In this initial document you should:

1. Define the problem you plan to address as clearly as you can.
2. Explain why there is a need for a project in this area.
3. Describe the general approach you would use to conduct the project.

Share this preliminary paper with your mentor. Ask whether the idea has potential for a successful project. If the basic idea has some promise, ask the mentor to help you refine and improve it. This may involve a reformulation of the problem or suggestions of more productive ways to address it.

You may also wish to seek feedback from fellow students. Suggestions received in the initial stages are easier to incorporate and are considerably more helpful than those offered when your prospectus is nearly complete.

After your mentor approves your preliminary idea you should proceed to write the prospectus. Expect to spend considerable time in refining your prospectus. Time and care expended in analyzing the problem and planning appropriate procedures will reduce the likelihood of difficulty and disappointment in conducting your project and will enable you to write the final report with fewer problems.
Each member of your capstone committee must approve your prospectus. Approval by email is sufficient and should be obtained BEFORE you begin the capstone. An approved prospectus becomes a protection to you because it assures you that when faculty members evaluate your completed project they cannot fault you for conducting the project according to the approved plan.

The prospectus for a proposed capstone project should be five to eight pages in length and include the following:

1. **Statement of the problem**
   - Show that there is a need for the proposed instructional product.
   - Explain how you propose to meet this need more efficiently or more effectively than it has been met in the past.

2. **Statement of the purpose of the instructional product**
   - State the general goals or learning outcomes.
   - List the objectives for meeting each goal.

3. **Description of the characteristics of the target audience for the instruction**
   - Describe demographics such as age, grade level, and job title.
   - Describe entry behaviors, prior knowledge of topic, attitudes, motivations, education levels, learning orientations, and other relevant group characteristics.

4. **Description of the general nature of the instructional materials to be developed**
   - Identify the main components of the product, including authors or sources of each component.
   - Explain the media to be used to deliver the instruction and rationale for its selection.
   - Describe the proposed instructional strategy.

5. **Description of the procedures to be employed in formatively evaluating the product**
   - State the primary issues and concerns on which the evaluation will focus.
   - Present the questions that you intend to answer during the product evaluation.
   - Describe the methods, instruments, and procedures used to collect and analyze data that will permit you to answer the various questions or address the issues and concerns identified.

6. **Proposed schedule for completing the project**
   - List the various activities or phases of the project.
   - Indicate the starting and completion date for each activity.
   - Estimate the number of person hours you anticipate will be required to complete each activity.

The guide for writing projects and prospectus for the Master of Arts in Learning and Technology is the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (5th Edition, 2001)*. Chapter 2 of this handbook provides helpful guidance about writing style and grammar. Chapters 3 and 4 provide guidance regarding the use of headings, abbreviations, quotations, footnotes, and reference citations plus helpful directions for preparing tables, figures and the list of references.

These prospectus guidelines were excerpted and adapted from Brigham Young University’s Instructional Psychology and Technology website titled *Preparing a Prospectus for a Project* and used by permission of P. F. Merrill, retrieved October 2, 2002 from [http://www.byu.edu/ipt/program/ms_prospectus_guide.html](http://www.byu.edu/ipt/program/ms_prospectus_guide.html).