Research Proposal Comments

Standpoints
Information vs. perspectives
In the 'standpoints' section you need to go beyond just providing information about your topic. There is always more than one perspective on what a "right answer" or solution may be to the topic you're investigating. It's your task to explore those different perspectives and integrate them into your work. At the very least, you should make mention of a contradictory perspective, if only to strengthen your own case. It makes for a more sophisticated argument. When you are including these various perspectives note key authors who take this stand (and pay attention to their disciplinary background too).

And avoid dichotomized (either/or; dualistic) discussion...
Introduce a number of perspectives or standpoints to develop a nuanced discussion that looks at the various aspects of an issue rather than putting all of your energy in trying to prove that one standpoint is 'true' while it's polar opposite is 'false'.

Topics, Subtopics, Questions
Topic selection also requires a working hypothesis...something that you're (initially) out to prove. If your topic doesn't bring you to a working hypothesis (and eventually a thesis) then you shouldn't be using it as your topic...it may be interesting but it's not going to be suitable for the assignment expectations and requirements.

Your topic is fine, but it's kind of boring...you need to make sure that you're asking *critical questions* of the topic you're investigating. If you don't ask and discuss critical questions concerning your topic, the paper becomes a discussion of other people's perspectives (a synthesis), which is an OK starting place (but kinda boring). If you go beyond the synthesis to analysis (looking at the viewpoints you've synthesized and saying something about them [answering the "so what" question...imagine you're telling us why we should care]) you will be entering the "A" zone.

Critical questions vs. 'proving' your point
Put more effort into asking critical questions and developing new ideas and less effort into trying to prove that one single specific statement is true – in your quest to prove this truth you'll probably miss some interesting elements of the discussion that raise new questions and add depth to your ideas.

Political, Economic, and Moral Issues
These topic areas are huge, huge and huge. You need to specifically outline what the political, economic and moral issues you plan on engaging with are. Be specific as possible – don't leave it up to us to guess which issues you refer to because we will probably guess wrong.

The relationship between questions you're asking and subtopics...you should be able to "map" the questions that are focusing your investigation to subtopics you're planning on investigating. If you have either one without another (i.e. a subtopic without questions or a question without an appropriate subtopic) you need to decide a) if it's relevant and b) how you're going to make the connection.

"Who is in control of our water and are they mismanaging it?"
This kind of statement lacks a sophisticated understanding about the topic: is there ever one person/organization in charge of anything as broad as water? If you're interested in finding out who is in charge of something, you need to be incredibly focused. Your job for this paper is not to lay blame at the feet of an individual or organization. You need to find a location, a context and a specific issue and try to find out how whatever problem you're looking at arose. For example, if you want to look at water and environmental justice, you could look at a specific neighbourhood in Victoria, BC where raw sewage is dumped into the ocean. What are the issues there, historically and currently? Your work will always be better if you can move from the specific into the larger implications of that specific problem, but you have to start with something specific.

Style
Try not to use jargon, general, non-specific terms or universalized statements. For example:
"Extensive manufacturing and the use of technology creates new problems that create new dangers that affect environmental quality and cultures."
What does this mean?!? Avoid using non-specific terms in strings (and assuming we're going to know what you're trying to say). Be wary of the jargon you use in your work: general terms and jargon are often a way of "BSing" your way through a paper. Your work should be clear and easy to understand.

"The environment" or "Nature"...need to be specific: the environment is just too general. What do you really mean when you write 'the environment'?

"People who live in rural areas are more connected to the environment"
Need to watch universal statements: impossible to prove (generally incorrect — there are always exceptions) and make for a poor argument and paper.

Terms:
Human – not man!
Developing vs. developed world; 1st vs. 3rd world – be clear about how you are defining these regions and how your names and defining boundaries fit into the context of your discussion.

References
You need to state what referencing style you're using and use it. If you don't identify what referencing style you're using in the final paper, you will lose marks.

The problem of problems

Looking at problems, on one hand, seems attractive because the possibility exists to find someone to blame for the problem. Here's the problem (pun intended) with that kind of thinking: problems may be an enticing way to engage with a topic, but they don't lead to sophisticated analysis. Your job for this assignment is not to search for a global "environmental" crisis and someone to blame. It's a research essay. You're to find a topic that's related to the course and that you find interesting, then, do some research, develop an opinion based on that work, and write a paper. Let's say you're interested in urban park space. Here's two ways that you could frame your discussion:

	Poor	Better
Working hypothesis	Cities, as they expand, destroy valuable farmland and forest and create polluted living spaces.	Toronto is known for its extensive canopy cover, provided by mature trees, both on street and in its extensive ravine system. This canopy cover helps connect urban residents to wild places. I am going to examine the different roles that High Park plays in three interrelated systems: 1. the local non-human ecosystem 2. the local community 3. as an important bioregional greenspace for both humans and non-humans
Subtopics	1. Government planning 2. Globalized food systems 3. Pollution and human health	1. Local non-human ecosystem 2. Local community 3. Bioregional significance
Questions	-what can the government do to stop urban sprawl? -where does our food come from? -how do pesticides kill humans?	-how does High Park act as a focus for community-based activism? -what ecological restoration programs have been implemented in High Park? -what are some of the ethical implications of removing non-native species? -how is High Park biologically and conceptually linked to other green spaces in the GTA?
Standpoints	-urban sprawl is bad -parks are a solution to urban sprawl	-urban green spaces increase urban citizen's awareness of the flora and fauna of their bioregion -the biological community helps connect the human community, acts as a focal point for activism