Many funding agencies ask for an initial concept paper to see if they are interested in considering the activity for funding (first stage triage). Others make a decision regarding funding based on the level of information provided in the concept paper only. Therefore, it is a means to sell an idea for a research study or some other project.

Alternatively, one may be asked to develop a concept paper for an idea, such as for a program or policy. This may be distributed to gain supporters/develop a coalition. It may also be used to garner funding.

In many instances, it is necessary to get a train of thought, an idea or concept down on paper to a) see how it sounds; b) go and talk to people about it. For you now, and in the future, it is a means to develop a vision for and/or sell an idea for a research study/thesis. A faculty member/advisor may ask a student to develop a concept paper as an initial step in the development of their ideas.

A concept paper is most often a one-pager, which creates a vision for and/or sells an idea. Sometimes, a 2-pager, or up to a 5-pager may be developed/requested. For your assignment, you are to write a 2-3 pager.

In a concept paper, you are selling 4 things:

1) the significance of the problem
2) the need to know the information to be obtained in the work
3) you are the person to do the work
4) the knowledge gained is worth the cost

Note that the language used is persuasive, action-oriented, power language, not third person or passive language.

Depending on the audience, it may not be appropriate to use words like study, hypothesis, aims, research, power, and citations may not be useful or persuasive.

Specific key elements in a concept paper:

1) The problem to be addressed is significant/importance
2) The rationale for addressing the problem is sound (theoretical model)
3) The goal of the project is clear
4) The objectives are measurable and worth achieving
5) The details of the methods, population, timeline are clear and indicate it is thought through
6) There is an audience for the results from the project and they will be actionable
7) Key references (may be optional)
8) Bottom line budget