

Easy Grant Writing Tips

with thanks to NORDP
(National Organization of Research Development Professionals)
and Dr. Robert Porter

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Grant Writing vs. Academic Writing

- * Academic writing style is great for journal articles, etc.) but *not* for most grants.
- * If a reviewer says a proposal “reads like a journal article,” this is not a good thing!
- * To succeed at grant writing, you need a new set of writing skills.

Shift Your Perspective

- * Don't explain why you need funding...
- * **Show** how you can help agency further its own goals.
- * You and funder are a team, working on common goals.
- * Take reviewer's POV, reading 100's of proposals.
- * Make yours stand out: Innovative, brief, clear, exciting.
- * Essential info on 1st page (goals, activities, outcomes)
- * Write for generalists, not specialists

Shift Your Perspective (cont.)

- * Like advertising, but don't sell yourself or your idea
- * "Sell" your action plan and expected results
- * Action-oriented (Project, activities, outcomes)
(Not theories or ideas)
- * Future-oriented (What you will do & accomplish)
- * Persuasive (Enthusied about topic)
- * Service attitude (Who your project will help)
- * Written for broad audience

Comparison of Writing Styles

Grant Writing

- * Easy to understand
- * Brief, concise
- * Personal, enthusiastic
- * “Sell” to the reader
- * Goals, activities, outcomes
- * Action-oriented
- * Agency goals, service
- * Team-focused

Academic Writing

- * Academic language, jargon
- * Long, verbose, roundabout
- * Objective
- * Explain to the reader
- * Thesis statement, theory
- * Focused on ideas
- * Your own goals
- * Individualistic

Common grant writing mistakes

Most common problem: Writing style

- * Roundabout, unfocused: *“Takes too long to figure out what they want to do”*
- * Academic: *“Written like a journal paper”*
- * Verbose: Too long, small font, can say in simpler way
- * Doesn't address solicitation (RFP guidelines)
- * Project too broad, ambitious, global scope
- * Unfocused research (*‘Trust me’ syndrome*)
- * PI not qualified to do the research (Expertise)

How does grant writing style look in practice?

- * Short, clear sentences
- * Key phrases underlined or bolded
- * Lists (bulleted or numbered)
- * Graphs and tables
- * Active voice (I or we), future-focused
- * Strong, persuasive phrasing
- * Conveys enthusiasm
- * Includes goals, activities, outcomes, evaluation plan

What do reviewers look for?

First, show what project is about & how it fits program objectives.

- * Clear, concise writing
- * Interesting, innovative ideas that contribute to the field
- * Preliminary data to show that the approach has promise
- * Clear project description with sound research plan
- * Expertise (PI is well-qualified for the research)

First impressions: *“The abstract sells it. If I’m not interested by the 1st page, the proposal is lost.”*

Big picture: *“I get to the big picture first. If I like it, I go to the details. If not, I’m done reading.”*

Reviewers' Suggestions

- * *Start much sooner than you think you need to.*
- * *Know what's already been done on the topic.*
- * *Write in clear, simple, accessible language to be understood by diverse readers.*
- * *Don't take rejection personally.*
- * *Make resubmission a habit!*

First page sells it!

- * Abstract may be only section some reviewers read
- * “Who cares?”: What are you passionate about?
- * “So what?”: What is the problem (& why is it important)?
- * How is current knowledge or practice inadequate?
- * Why is your idea better? (new, unique)
- * What will it contribute and who will benefit from it?
- * Cite authoritative source(s)
- * Describe what you will do (step by step) and how you will measure success

Writing Exercise: Focusing Your Ideas

Answer each in 25 words or less:

1. What are you passionate about in research?
2. What is the problem or need; why is it important?
3. How is existing knowledge or practice inadequate?
4. Why is your idea better (new, unique)?
5. What will it contribute and who will benefit?

Writing Exercise: Simplicity

Substitute one word for the following phrases:

- * At this point in time
- * Has the ability to
- * In light of the fact that
- * In the near future
- * The question as to whether
- * A large percentage of
- * In the majority of cases

Writing Exercise: Active Voice

Rewrite these sentences in active voice:

A) Initiatives are being introduced in nearly every industrialized nation designed to improve the quality of their schools.

B) In general, it is recognized that people who have a great deal of expertise in a given area are capable of exercising considerable influence over others.

Examples of active voice

Suggestions for rewriting examples on previous pg:

A) Most industrialized nations are working to improve their schools.

B) Experts can greatly influence their peers.

Writing Style: Eliminate Jargon

Rewrite the following sentence in a simpler style with the same meaning:

It has been determined that this study will develop an effective commercialization strategy for solar energy systems by analyzing the factors that are impeding commercial projects and by prioritizing the potential government and industry actions that can facilitate the viability of the projects.

Writing Exercise: Confident Language

Rewrite the following “tentative” phrases:

A) A general review of the literature indicates that this topic has likely not been previously investigated.

B) By investigating the characteristics of biochar, we hope to determine new future roles for it in the field of alternative energy.

C) While it is true that Dr. Jones has never worked on a kinesiology project, his extensive research in biology will contribute to the work.

Examples of confident language

Examples from previous page:

A) Our study will be the first of its kind in this neglected field.

B) This study will contribute to scientific knowledge on the role of biochar in the developing field of alternative energy.

C) Dr. Jone's biological perspectives on muscle spindles will contribute significantly to the study and its dissemination.

Grant Writing Process

- * Read RFP and guidelines, adjust plan to fit
- * Consider alternate sources and grant types
- * Brainstorm with collaborators
- * Contact grant officers to ensure fit (run by WSU staff?)
- * Get internal WSU deadline
- * Rewrite several times with peer and editor feedback Use COE Grant Toolkit page from Research menu
- * Fill out Proposal Planning Form and click “submit” to automatically alert staff who can help you.
- * Questions? Contact Laura Girardeau at lgirardeau@wsu.edu