

No, Seriously, *I Really* Want an **A**

A guide for preparing the final proposal
release 2.0

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"Hey, you! Gimme some money!": Tone

Keep in mind that you are asking for money. Indeed, in some cases you are asking for *millions* of dollars. The project proposal is a hard sell for what you want to do; it is your one and only chance to convince an organization to give you a grant. Therefore, it is *imperative* that you strike the right tone.

And what might that tone be? You need to write with authority and confidence. You've researched this problem and this solution thoroughly. In the process, you've become a mini-expert on this situation. That *has* to come across in what you write. In other words, you have to sound like you know what you're talking about. In introducing your research, citing your authorities (and citing them *as* authorities), you are substantiating your own ability to offer this proposal. Don't sound informal, this is a formal piece of writing. However, don't sound too formal, either. Keep in mind that this is going to the desk of an intelligent, but normal, person. Using high-falutin' words doesn't make you sound authoritative—it just makes you hard to understand. Avoid both colloquialisms and erudite words (what's an "erudite" word? well, "erudite" is a good example ☺). Simply sound sure of yourself—and you should be, after all the work you've done.

It's also important that you sound together and organized. Your sentences should be clean and straightforward, while your overall proposal should flow from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, section to section. The best way to sound together is to *be* together to start with: outline each section and stick to your outline, and make sure your outline has some sort of logical progression. Use subsections in your Literature Review not only to help your reader but to help yourself as well. Focus on *logos*, convincing using logic: facts, figures, evidence, and examples.

Finding that tone of confidence can go a long way towards getting your proposal accepted, even if parts of it are rough. Think of con men/women. After all, they're called *confidence* men/women for a reason—they get you to do what they want precisely because they get you to have confidence in them. Do the same: create confidence, get cash. Nice equation, huh?

"Oooooo! That's Pretty!": Design

Design is about as important as tone, and for many of the same reasons: a well-designed document creates a sense of authority and professionalism, and thereby also helps you to get your money.

In thinking about the design of your document, keep everything we said about resumés in mind: be aware of adequate white space, use a clean, professional font¹, and be entirely consistent throughout your document. Use one-inch margins on all sides, and a font size of about 12pt (This, for example, is 12pt font. This is 10pt, which depending on the font, can be harder to read).

I always find designing a document the fun part. Take this document for example, I spent maybe 10 or 15 minutes choosing a font and a general layout. I played with vertical and horizontal lines (available in all word processors. Ummmm, MS Word? Ask the damned paper clip how to do it!). I also used underlining, bold, different font sizes, small caps, and a footer. The result, I think, looks good (OK, well at least not that bad).

The two most important things to remember about design are cleanliness and consistency. The design of the document should never interfere with its purpose, which is to convey information. Getting too cute, too fancy, or using too many fonts will distract your reader from what you are trying to say. Make it clean, keep it simple. And whatever you choose, use it throughout. Every section title should look the same; every subsection title should look the same.

Remember that there's a proficient A, which does everything it's supposed to do and has nothing outright wrong. But there's also the **BANG!WOW!!** A, which moves into the A-range in part from its look alone. Keep in mind our discussion of the Douglass campus safety proposal. Content-wise, it's OK. But it looks so damned good that it got an A. Look good, get money. That's not fair, but that's life.

¹ I recommend the family of fonts called "sans serif," which means they have no extra little lines. For example, "A" in Times New Roman has little lines, called "serifs" at the bottom, while "A" in this font, "Trebuchet" has no extra lines and therefore looks cleaner. Ummmm, do I need to sell Arial *again*?

"Why the hell is this on my desk?": Transmittal Letter

- Function:** From M. Markel's *Technical Communication*: "The letter of transmittal introduces the purpose and content of the document to the principal reader" (270). Imagine you are mailing this proposal off to someone. They'll read this letter accompanying your report first, so it tells them what just landed on their desk and why it landed on *their* desk. Not only does this letter tell them what this is, but it more importantly established why you sent it to *them*.
- Form:** Standard business letter format. I recommend full block style, in which all elements are flush with the left margin and appear in this order: 1. Return address (your address without your name); 2. Date, right below return address or one line after it; 3. Inside address, which includes the name of the person you are writing to, their title, the organization, and the address; 4. Greeting (with colon); 5. Body of the letter, no indents with paragraphs; 6. Closing and signature. If you choose to use modified block style, good luck. **KEEP IN MIND ALL LETTERS MUST BE SIGNED, DUH.**
- Content:** From W. Oliu's *Writing That Works*: "the transmittal letter most often opens with a brief paragraph (one or two sentences) explaining what is being sent and why. The next paragraph contains a brief summary of the material or stresses some feature that would be important to the reader. . . . The letter may go on to point out specific sections that would be of particular interest to the reader. . . . The closing paragraph should acknowledge any help received in the preparation of the material, other additional assistance, or express the hope that the material will fulfill its purpose" (238). So the overall flow should be: Para1: Establish what you are sending and why you are sending it to *this* person. Para2: Overview the problem. Para3: Overview your proposed solution. Para3: Conclude and invite further contact.
- Design:** Standard business letter design.

"READ ME!!": Title Page

- Function:** From R. Cason's *Writing for the Business World*: "The title is the subject line for the report. It should tell the reader exactly what the document contains. . . . Like the subject line for a memo, the title must specifically tell the reader what will be forthcoming" (119). But, more, the title page is the first thing the reader sees of the actual report: it provides the first impression, and as well all know, you only get one chance to make a first impression. Not only does it inform the reader, and not only should it impress the reader, but it should draw that reader into the document as well.
- Form:** Use one-inch margins on the sides and at least two-inch margins top and bottom. You may or may not want to center the page top to bottom as well as left to right. Keep white space in mind, and do what looks best. Make sure the title is prominent and then make sure the title page contains all required information.
- Content:** The title page contains: the title of the proposal, who prepared it (that's you), who it's being submitted to (that's your funding source, not me), and the date (that's July 8, 1999). Be sure to follow the normal rules for capitalizing titles. Use "prepared by" or "submitted by" in conjunction with your name and "prepared for" or "submitted to" for your funding source. You may or may not use "date," since it's kinda obvious that "July 8, 1999" is a date.
- Design:** Open, but should convey the initial impression of the overall document design. You might include a relevant graphic or clip art, and might print the page in color. You might also experiment with center, left, and right justification, as well as horizontal and vertical lines. The title page *might* use a different font than the document itself, but even then be sure that the font is clean and professional and not cute or hokey.

"So what's this all about?": Abstract

- Function:** From M. Killingsworth's *Information in Action*: "The *abstract* of a report . . . gives the fullest representation of the content as possible within a very short space and ranges from 100 to 300 words. It is a summary that gives a balanced view of the report." (277). Think of the report as a structure with various levels of information: the title page gives the broadest sense of what the proposal is about while the abstract gives a quick, cursory understanding of all the parts of the report. There are two kinds of abstracts, descriptive and informative. You will be writing a descriptive abstract.
- Form:** Double-spaced paragraph with one-inch margins. Title "Abstract" appears at the top of the page.
- Content:** Killingsworth gives a good rule of thumb: "write a sentence for every major section in the report, making sure that you clearly state [the problem addressed in the report, the purpose of the report, and the position supported by the report]" (277). After writing a summary sentence for each section, review the resulting paragraph and revise for fluidity. Abstracts can be choppy, so be sure each sentence leads to the next. The general flow should be: introduction of project as a whole, overview of problem, overview of what's been done, overview of what you want to do. Avoid specifics, an abstract is *abstracted* information: the proposal has all the specifics.
- Design:** Consistent with the overall document design.

"Tell me quick; I have to golf.": Executive Summary

FOR BUSINESS WRITING ONLY

- Function:** From M. Markel's *Technical Communication*: "The *executive summary* . . . is a one- or two-page condensation of the document. Its audience is managers, who rely on executive summaries to cope with the tremendous amount of paper crossing their desks every day." (279). This is the next level of information, after the title page and abstract. Thus, the executive summary provides more detail than the abstract—a fuller view of the project—but less detail than the proposal itself. It is middle information for middle management. It's more common in reports that are hundreds of pages long, but it's important for you to learn how to do it here.
- Form:** Double-spaced paragraphs with one-inch margins. Title "Executive Summary" appears at the top of the page. As a general rule of thumb, an executive summary should be approximately ten percent of the length of the report. For the purposes of this class, it should be 1.5-2 pages.
- Content:** Think of this as an expanded abstract, so follow this general flow: one quick introductory and overview paragraph, one paragraph summarizing the problem, one paragraph summarizing what's been done, one paragraph summarizing what you want to do, and perhaps a paragraph summarizing budget needs. This is still a *summary*, so you want to make sure you summarize the contents of your proposal. The details are inside, so although you want to specify problem, approaches, and solution, you don't want specific quotes, facts, or figures.
- Design:** Consistent with the overall document design.

"Where do I find ...?": Tables of Contents & Figures

- Function:** From M. Markel's *Technical Communication*: "A table of contents has two main functions . . . *To help readers find the information they want. . . To help readers understand the scope and organization of the document.*" (276). Similarly, the Table of Figures, which may or may not be a separate page, helps readers find your various figures while suggesting the scope of visual information within the document.
- Form:** As its name suggests, it is a table. Most word processors will generate a table of contents for you. For example, if using WordPerfect 6.0a for Windows, look under the Tools menu. On Word, the process is similar, though a little more complicated. Ask the paper clip for help.
- Content:** Every major section should be listed except for the title page, the letter of transmittal (which is not a part of the report proper), and the table of contents itself. In addition, list your subsections as well. For example, if your Literature Review has subsections, be sure to list each one. Front matter, such as the abstract, is numbered in small roman numerals. The title page is roman numeral "i" although that number does not appear on the title page. Thus, the abstract is the first page that can be numbered, and it is "ii." The first page of your actual report is "1." Roman numerals should be centered at the bottom of the page.
- Design:** Consider the above suggestions only guidelines. Thus, you may choose to use a header or footer to number your pages, if that is part of your overall document design. Similarly, your word processor might have several different templates for the table of contents. Choose one consistent with your overall document design.

"Making sense.": Organization

As I suggested in the section on tone, it's important for you to be organized. In fact, it's so important that I thought it warranted a little more discussion.

Organization relies on logic, which is good because your whole sales pitch for this project of yours also relies on logic. Unfortunately, this is a class in the forms and norms of specific kinds of writing, and not a class on logic. But this isn't complicated logic, it's just important that the flow of your proposal makes sense.

Part of that work is already done for you. The pieces-parts of the proposal come in a prescribed order, one which has a general flow of problem (Introduction), what's been done (Literature Review), what you want to do (Procedures). Please note that that's also the general flow I recommend for the abstract and the executive summary (business writing only on this last one). Use this general flow as the overall organizing principle of your project.

Each section needs to be organized as well. For example, your Introduction details the problem, so find an organization that logically develops the sense of the problem. In other words, guide your readers paragraph by paragraph, hold their hands, and don't let them get lost. I'll discuss various ideas for organizing the sections later in this document. For now, just keep in mind that each one *needs* to be organized.

Paragraphs within sections need to be organized as well. Each paragraph should flow to the next, and each sentence within each paragraph should flow to the next. If you've ever had me write "choppy" in response to your writing, that's a problem of flow and thus a problem of organization. Try reading your writing out loud: does it have a smooth rhythm? does each sentence/paragraph lead to the next? If you have problems with fluid writing, invest in a grammar handbook and review the section on transitions.

Organization is vital. As the underlying logic of your proposal, it is the foundation for your logical appeal. Start with a good foundation.

"Says who?": Citation

For Technical Writing:

You must cite your sources in your text using APA format. Be sure to introduce your authorities in your text. Unlike other forms of writing, you don't want to subsume the quotation into your voice/text—you're relying on these people as authorities instead, so be sure to point out who they are. APA uses parenthetical notation, which means the source of that quotation/information should appear in parentheses at the end of the sentence. Specifically, include the name and year in parentheses, and, if it's a quotation, include the page number as well. Borrow my APA book, or search for online guides if you need help with APA style.

For Business Writing:

You must cite your sources in your text using MLA format. Be sure to introduce your authorities in your text. Unlike other forms of writing, you don't want to subsume the quotation into your voice/text—you're relying on these people as authorities instead, so be sure to point out who they are. MLA uses parenthetical notation, which means the source of that quotation/information should appear in parentheses at the end of the sentence. Specifically, include the author's last name and the page number (just a number—no "p." or "#") in parentheses. Review Cason pp.105-107 for more information on how to include citations in your text. For information on citing websites, visit the MLA at http://www.mla.org/set_stl.htm.

"OK, the problem is . . .": Introduction

- Function:** The introduction of a proposal *introduces* the problem. It therefore serves as an "introduction" in that it sets the stage for the rest of the report. This is the part of the proposal which most fully details your problem. Don't think of this as a traditional introduction; instead, think of it as the place where you fully describe, evidentialize, and substantiate your specific problem.
- Form:** This begins the proposal proper: one-inch margins, double-spaced. This section should be 1.5-2 pages long. Titled "introduction."
- Content:** While the opening paragraph might read like a traditional "introduction," the rest of this section delineates and substantiates the problem. It should contain the bulk of your information on the problem: facts, figures, studies, examples. Choose a logical structure for development: move spatially from a national problem to a local one; move chronologically tracing a history of a problem present today; move vertically from a surface statement of the problem to an in-depth detailing of it; or select some other logical progression which establishes your problem evidentially. Think of this as an expanded form of the very opening of your midterm paper, and in fact I recommend that you start with what you said about your problem in your midterm and develop that into the proper length.
- Design:** Consistent with document design.

"What's been done?": Literature Review

- Function:** You want to do something: you've found a problem and you want to propose a solution. But before you do that, before you get the *money* to do that, you need to establish what's already been done. The primary purpose of the Literature (or Research) Review is to do just as it says: review what literature exists on this subject, review what research has already been conducted on the problem. Thus, the Literature Review is important because it also points to the shortcomings of what's been done: implicitly (perhaps explicitly) it shows the need for what you are proposing to do. It has a second function as well; in reviewing the research you've conducted on this problem it also establishes your authority. It's precisely because you've reviewed all this literature that you know about the problem and know what needs to be done.
- Form:** Titled "Literature Review" or "Research Review." One-inch margins, double-spaced. This section should be 3-7 pages, with 3 being *quite* short. Use subsection headings to organize the information you have.
- Content:** The Literature Review does not go into the problem or the details of the solution: that's the job of the Introduction and the Procedures sections, respectively. Instead, this section of your proposal should review your research. If you are dealing with a technical subject, you might open with a brief section explaining basic terms and concepts. Similarly, you might open with a section that goes into the history of the problem in the research (e.g., As far back as 1965, this problem was noted by J.A. Mikkelsworth, who concluded that . . .). The bulk of the section should cover what has already been attempted (e.g., separate sections on each current approach). If you have a specific approach to the problem, a theory, paradigm, or accepted standard, you should detail that here. If you have an example or case study which proves the effectiveness of your solution, give it its own section. Finally, the very last section of the Literature Review can review the research on your solution: the evidence that this approach is best. You should be able to develop this entire piece of the project (the largest bulk of the project, in many ways) from your midterm paper.
- Design:** Consistent with document design.

"What *exactly* will I do with your money?": Procedures

- Function: This section details exactly what you want to do. The key word here is *details*: you want to lay out your program as fully as possible.
- Form: Open. Title "Recommendations" or "Procedures" appears at the top of the page. You might use tables or subsections.
- Content: Describes your entire solution in as much detail as possible. And by that I mean that you spell out just what you will do. Think a lot about all the necessary details of your program: time, space, materials, personnel: the more detail you give, the fewer questions you will have from your funding source. Indeed, think of this as a plan that can be followed, so that if you got the cash tomorrow, you could give this section to a group of people and they would know just what to do to make your project a reality.
- Design: Consistent with the overall document design.

"No, really, it's not that much.": Budget

- Function:** You're asking for money. The budget details how you are going to spend it. It's an important part of the proposal; people don't like giving away money and the budget shows them what their cash will be used for.
- Form:** Open, though tables or columns are very effective. Title "Budget" appears at the top of the page. You might start with a paragraph that explains some of the costs, or the table, or how you calculated costs.
- Content:** **YOU MUST HAVE A SINGLE FUNDING SOURCE BY THIS TIME.** If you are planning on multiple funding, good, but direct the proposal to one of the funding sources. Include an overall budget, but also a breakdown of how much or what parts of that budget will be covered by this specific funding source. **THE BEST BUDGETS ARE DETAILED AND REFLECT AS MUCH OF THE ACTUAL COSTS AS POSSIBLE.** If your project is huge, you have a few options: estimate costs from previous similar projects, contact companies that would be involved and ask for rough estimates, or create a more general plan which involves various phases, one of which is a request for construction bids or proposals. You'll still need a rough estimate of the cost, and you should also figure out how much each phase would cost, but you won't need full details of construction, since that will be supplied by the RFB/RFP. If your project is small, it will still involve *some* costs. If certain parts are free (donated services, for example,) detail them in the budget and indicate that there is no cost for that part of the project. Remember, if your project has *no* costs then there's no reason to get a grant to do it. Also remember that it costs something to do anything in this world.
- Design:** Consistent with the overall document design.

"Trust me, it'll be worth it.": Discussion

Function: The Discussion serves as the conclusion of your proposal. But just as the Introduction is not a usual introduction, so too the Discussion is not like a normal conclusion—which is to say, this section is more than fluff. The function of the discussion is first and foremost to complete the sell. It finishes the report and suggests that they'll get their money's worth.

Form: 1-3 pages.

Content: You might discuss subsidiary benefits of your solution. It's *definitely* a good idea to detail a plan for evaluating the effectiveness of the solution (proof that they're getting their money's worth). And finally, yes, this section does conclude after all.

Design: Consistent with the overall document design.

"Phew! Look at all the work I did.": Bibliography

- Function:** The bibliography allows readers to consult the same works you have consulted, to locate the same sources you have located, to perform the same research you have performed.
- Form:** Titled "Bibliography." **Business Writing students:** Review the material in Cason, pp.102-104. Refer to http://www.mla.org/set_stl.htm on the web for information on using web sources. Also note that a bibliography should be double-spaced within and between entries. **Technical Writing students:** Review APA format. Please note that personal interviews do not appear in the bibliography in APA format. If you use paragraph indents (first line indented), then be sure to double space throughout the bibliography. If you choose hanging indents instead (second and subsequent lines indented), then single space within entries, and double space between them.
- Content:** This is a bibliography, not a works cited page. That means that you can list works you consulted but did not directly refer to in your proposal. The bibliography thus reflects the whole of your research. It must have at least 10 items, and there must be a fair representation of scholarly/journal articles/books.
- Design:** Consistent with the overall document design, but be sure to follow indentation rules for your documentation style (APA or MLA).

"Don't read, just look.": Figures

Please keep in mind that your final proposal should have at least three figures: graphs, charts, illustrations, or tables. These three should be worked into your document's text, should be labeled properly, referred to properly within the text, and listed in the Table of Illustrations. When listing them in the Table of Illustrations, don't just put "Table 1," "Figure 1," etc. Instead, provide a caption for each, and use that caption with the actual figure as well. Also, be sure to provide the source for any figure you take from another source.

The most important thing to remember about figures is that they are meant to provide visual information in a highly visual culture. Thus, they should be *very* clear, readable, and understandable. Use color printing if you can for dense pie charts—all those grays can be hard to distinguish. Also be sure to label everything properly in charts—your reader should know just what is being represented.

You should have your figures already from your oral presentation. If I made any comments about a visual aid being hard to read, then you might want to tweak it. Remember not to present too much information, just enough for the eye to absorb.

Your textbook has excellent information on figures. Review it.

"Yeah, I got more info on that.": Appendices

If you have information that is too extensive or too large to fit into your text, include it in an appendix. Title and label all appendices, list them in the table of contents, and refer to them in your text.

You might want to think about the necessity of your appendices. Keep in mind that this is a long document to start with: is your reader going to need the information you have in that appendix? Just something to keep in mind.

"What do I do with these pieces?": Assembly

OK, so here's what I should get from you, in the order I should get it:

1. Letter of Transmittal (signed)
2. Title Page
3. Abstract
4. Table of Contents(/Table of Figures)
- (5. Table of Figures [on separate page perhaps])
6. Executive Summary (**Business Writing students only**)
7. Introduction
8. Literature Review (might also be called Research Review)
9. Procedures (might also be called Recommendations)
10. Budget
11. Discussion
- (12. Appendices)
13. Bibliography

I also want all rough drafts with your final copy: that means every draft and piece that has my comments, as well as the full drafts with peer comments.

"Oops.": Error

Error can seriously impede your grade. That's not just because this is a writing class. In the real world, if you submit a document riddled with error, you're not going to get any money. Error detracts from your authority and professionalism.

So what do you do about it?

Proofread. Here are some suggestions.

- First, use your word processor's spell checker. But don't count on that. After all, in this sentence the word *cot* is spelled correctly, but it doesn't go "meow." In other words, spell checkers will not catch words that are spelled correctly but are not the word you want to use.
- Second, read through the document *only after you have gotten some sleep*. Gee, that assumes you're not trying to print it out right before class, or at 4:17 in the morning. Yes. Get it done. Take a break. Walk away from it. Get some rest. *Then* you will catch the errors. When you first complete a document your eyes are too tired and too used to the words you *want* to see there so you won't catch the errors. Thus, for example, I'm sure there are errors in this document, but I need to print this out before class in the morning, so I won't have a chance to proof. Good thing *I* don't get graded 😊.
- Third, read your work out loud. Sure, some people are gonna think you're a crazy person, but it's the best way to catch poor prose and awkward sentences. Your ear knows English better than your eyes do, since it used to the rhythms of the language. You may not know what's wrong with a sentence, but you will know it doesn't sound right.
- Finally, have someone else read it for you. Fresh eyes will see all the errors you can't.

If you know you have particular problems with writing, that's all the more reason to be sure you proofread carefully and thoroughly. Your grade *is* at stake.

"OK, so now do I get an A?": Some thoughts on grades

Mmmmmmmaybe.

If you follow these guidelines, you're in great shape, that's for sure. If you *don't* follow these guidelines, *wellllll*, you can't say I didn't warn you or didn't tell you what to do or how to do it. If you have any questions not covered by this document, ask. Believe it or not, your grade is *not* my responsibility—it's *yours*. You need to take the time and energy to follow these guidelines, ask me questions, come to my office hours, etc.

Let me also take a moment to emphasize the importance of drafting. If you've been completing these pieces during oral presentations, then you already have a whole set of comments from me on your proposal. If you skipped some of the work, oh well. You at least have my comments on your midterm, which is the base of this project. We'll also be doing guided peer revision in class, but if you don't respond to comments, mine or your peers, then oh well once again. It's not gonna bother me, 'cause I get a paycheck no matter what grade you get. But let me be clear: it's not that I don't care. On the contrary, I *am* invested, deeply so, in seeing each of you doing your very best, and I *will* do all I can to help you achieve the best grade you can (like, ummmm, spending a few hours putting together an exhaustive how-to packet ☺). **BUT**, in the end, it's up to you. This is a pen, not a magic wand. You need to do the work, though I will do all I can to help.

So what makes an A? Well, here are some of the grading criteria distributed to instructors of this class. An A:

- Sets an especially challenging or original task that the student fulfills
- Demonstrates excellent or innovative research, which is well ordered and cited
- Organizes the research into a clearly and carefully delineated paradigm
- Uses graphics that are highly effective at conveying information
- Has almost completely error free writing
- Has a degree of stylistic polish that exceeds the commonplace
- Exhibits a remarkably attractive appearance and visually appealing design

This forms the basis of my grading criteria, but it doesn't define it fully. Abstractly, an A is a proposal that would get the money. Specifically, I look for proposals which do each part (as defined in this document) correctly, if not in fact well.

And it's not the grade in the end, but what you've learned. Hokey, but true. Good luck.

"Ummm, what did he say?": Notes

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"Ummm, what did he say?": Notes