EFFECTIVE WRITING SKILLS

It is a good thing, perhaps, to write for the amusement of the public, but it is a far higher and nobler thing to write for their instruction, their profit, their actual and tangible benefit.
– Mark Twain

Writing on the job is never easy but it doesn't have to be as difficult or boring as most people make it out to be. In this unit, we will look at

- the principles of technical writing
- the techniques of generating and developing your ideas in a paragraph
- the revision of the written paragraph to ensure readability and coherence

What goal do you have in writing?
What objective do you wish to achieve?
What result do you hope for?

2 Know Your Purpose

Why are you writing? Questions like this addresses what you see as your purpose in whatever you are writing, whether a letter, a resume or a report. You must determine your purpose in your writing. And every piece of your writing should have a specific reason.

When you write, you must always go back to your purpose statements, when you plan, draft, and revise. The following shows a useful flowchart for technical writing.

Determining your purpose -> analyzing your audience -> collecting information -> completing an outline -> drafting -> revising for mechanics, grammar, style and content

Basically, technical writing has two main purposes:

a) To Inform

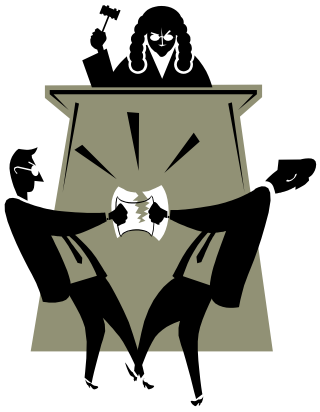
The first purpose – to inform – will be met by writing a report that objectively describes the programmers available.

Example: To inform technical writers about the various computer programmers available for use in editing manuscripts.

b) To Argue

The report that satisfies the second purpose – to argue – should be no less objective but will contain an argument that evaluates the programmers to demonstrate the superiority claimed, perhaps through a comparison and contrast of their features and simplicity of use.

Example: To inform technical writers about the various computer programmers available for use in editing manuscripts and to argue for the superiority of several programmers over others.



Much of technical writing is argumentative. Research reports inform readers of the facts that have been uncovered and then argue that the conclusions drawn from those facts are reliable. Similarly, recommendation reports inform, analyze, evaluate and draw conclusions that support their recommendations; proposals argue for engaging organizations to do certain tasks.

To be a successful writer, you must have a clear vision of what purpose you have for composing a given piece of writing. You are more likely to achieve your purpose if you state it in writing.

Some examples:

I want to convince the senior management of National Polytechnic to accept my IT department's proposal to implement a standard attendance system across different schools.

I want to convince the executives of DBS Bank to accept my company's proposal to update the software used by their tellers in reporting bank transactions.

I want to demonstrate to the upper management of Dickens Sporting Goods Company the feasibility of manufacturing the heads of golf clubs from lightweight titanium.

My purpose is to instruct the tellers of DBS Bank how to use the new software we have installed for their use in reporting bank transactions.

My purpose is to explain to the technicians who manufacture golf clubs for Dickens' Sporting Goods Company the techniques required for working with titanium in casting golf club heads.

Notice that all these statements of purpose mention the audience, that is, the person or persons to whom the writing is directed. Understanding your audience is essential to successful writing as understanding your purpose.

3 Know Your Audience

Write for your reader, not for yourself. – William Sanborn Pfeiffer

This is a cardinal rule that governs all on-the-job writing. Great writers understand their audiences. As you visualize your readers, consider these things:

- Their concerns and characteristics
- Their levels of education and experience
- Their attitudes toward your purpose and information

3.1 Concerns and Characteristics

Keeping your readers' concerns and characteristics in mind is essential to satisfying their needs and to accomplishing your own purpose.

For example, executives read primarily for the purpose of making decisions. Thus, an executive will be disappointed by a report that does not clearly state the author's conclusions backed by sufficient information.

Unlike executives, technicians read primarily for how-to information. Information should be written in language you clearly understand and organized in a format you can easily access. Similarly, experts read journals and papers to keep up to date on the latest research and developments in their fields.

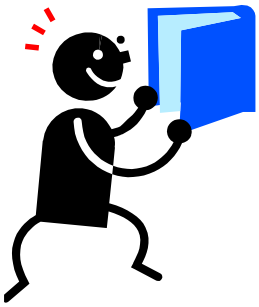
There would be occasions when you know little or nothing about your readers, for instance, you either cannot find information about them, or are blocked from doing so. Even if you do find information about your readers, it is important to note that most readers, especially those of technical backgrounds, prefer concise, simple writing. In this regard, the KISS principle (Keep It Short and Simple) would come in handy.

3.2 Education and Characteristics

Based on our individual levels of education and experience, we all learn vocabulary, concepts and techniques for doing things. Consider how the technical writers who produced the computer manual you use had to estimate your knowledge of how to use a keyboard and mouse. If they estimate correctly, you will be a happy reader; if their judgment was incorrect, you will be an unhappy reader.

When you write, you must consider how well your readers will understand the words, concepts, and techniques you write about. Accordingly, when you think your readers might need help with any of these aspects, offer it.

3.3 Attitudes toward Purpose and Information



Consider the position of someone writing a technical manual. He must acknowledge that few people approach using technical manuals with joy in their hearts. Instead, they most likely want to use manuals to find what information they need and would like to do so as easily and quickly as possible. Readers with this attitude want to read manuals selectively.

People can approach reading technical documents with varying attitudes: agreement or hostility, trust or skepticism, passion or indifference, eagerness or reluctance. One attitude, however, is nearly universal: No one wants to linger.

Whatever the specific interest, no one wants to read through unneeded information to get to needed information. Being forced to do so will put anyone in a hostile mood!

Therefore, in technical writing, you should ensure that it is organized and designed to allow readers to find and use needed information easily and to skip the rest.

4 Organize Your Content

Think Through This

When choosing your content and organizing your report, what do you need to know?

a) Your purpose
b) Your readers' concerns and characteristics
c) Your readers' education and experience in the subject area
d) Your readers' attitudes towards your purpose

4.1 Making an Outline

After determining your purpose and audience and armed with research, you must produce an outline which would benefit you greatly when you write. The following are what you should remember.

- Make an outline when you are organizing
- Writing things down helps clarify your thoughts
- Things not written down may be forgotten
- When you have a coherent outline that matches your purpose and audience, you will be ready to write

4.2 Choosing Content

The principle you should follow in choosing content is a simple one: Choose the level and amount of content that is needed to fulfill your purpose and your readers' needs, but no more than that.

4.3 Organizing your Content

When organizing your content, as when choosing it, keep your readers' needs firmly in mind.

5 Paragraph Structure

A paragraph consists of three parts: a topic sentence, supporting sentences and the concluding sentence. While the topic sentence and supporting sentences are essential for any paragraph, sometimes, in technical writing, the concluding sentence is left out. This usually occurs when the paragraph written is part of a longer essay which has a concluding paragraph. The structure of a paragraph may look like this:

TOPIC SENTENCE

Supporting Sentence	**Supporting Sentence**	**Supporting Sentence**

Concluding Sentence

Example of a paragraph	
All computers have several characteristics in common, regardless of make or design. Information in the form of instructions and data, is given to the machine, after which the machine acts on it and a result is then returned. The information presented to the machine is the input, the internal manipulative operations, the processing; and the result, the output. For example, in clothing manufacturing, the input is the pieces of cut cloth, the processing is the sewing together of these pieces, and the output is the finished garment. So we see these three basic concepts of input, processing and output occur in almost every aspect of human life, whether at work or at play. (*Adapted from Mullen & Brown, "English for Computer Science"*)	**Topic Sentence** **Supporting Sentences** **Concluding Sentence**

Here are two paragraphs adapted from Mullen & Brown's "English for Computer Science." Identify the topic sentence (TS), supporting sentences (SS) and concluding sentence (CS), following the earlier example.

1. (TS) The computer has changed the production of copy in the newspaper industry. (SS) There are three steps involved in the process: input, correction and output. First, the computer numbers each story, counts words and gives a listing of the length of each story. Then a page is made up, advertisements are placed in, the copy is shifted or deleted and corrections are made. (CS) Finally, the computer hyphenates words and the result of all this is a newspaper page.

2. (TS) Some of the most common methods of inputting information are to use punch cards, magnetic tape, disks and terminals. (SS) The computer's input device, which might be a card reader, a tape drive or disk drive, depending on the medium used, reads the information into the computer. (CS) For outputting information, two common devices used are a printer, which prints the new information on paper or a CRT display screen, which shows the results on a TV-like screen.

5.1 The Topic Sentence

In most academic and technical writing, the first sentence of each paragraph is called the topic sentence. The topic sentence is the most important sentence in the paragraph. It states the main idea of the paragraph tells the reader what the paragraph will be about. The topic sentence consists of the **subject (S) paragraph** and the **controlling idea (CI)**.

Some experienced writers, however, may place their topic sentences in the middle or at the end of the paragraph to achieve certain effects. Until you become familiar with technical writing, you should have the topic sentence at the beginning.
Examples:

1. [Swimming] is [a healthy form of exercise].
   S **CI**

2. [Computers] are [machines capable of processing and outputting data].
   S **CI**

3. [The CPU] coordinates [all activities of a computer].
   S **CI**

Now see if you can identify topic sentences. Which of the sentences below are topic sentences?

1. Running one's own business can be confusing.
2. You were not home this afternoon.
3. All disks are made of a substance coated with metal oxide and can be magnetized.
4. Automation causes confusion.
5. Magnetic disks are of two kinds, namely floppy and hard.
6. But since mid-1940s, computers have evolved tremendously.
7. The paper in a printer is heated in order to fix the characters on it.
8. Printers have different speeds, sizes and costs and are designed to meet printing needs.

That's right! All, except (2), are topic sentences. 

Now, try the following sentences. This time, identify the subject (S) and the controlling idea (CI).

1.	Writing a paragraph **(S)** requires careful planning **(CI)**.
2.	Low oil level in the crankcase **(S)** can result in expensive car repairs **(CI)**.
3.	Electricity flowing through a wire **(S)** is like liquid flowing through a pipe **(CI)**.
4.	In Saudi Arabia, parents **(S)** have separate responsibilities for raising their children **(CI)**.

5.2 Supporting Details

To communicate successfully, a paragraph must be about a single idea. To be complete, the topic sentence must be supported. The controlling ideas in the topic sentence must be

- explained
- described } with specific detail
- illustrated

Some techniques for supporting the topic sentence include using

- facts
- examples
- description
- comparison/contrast
- cause and effect

a) Facts – Factual material may be in the form of numbers, statistics or easily verifiable reasons.

b) Examples – Using examples to explain a point or to illustrate an idea is commonly used in text when the primary objective is to teach the reader about some subject. It is important to differentiate between the idea(s) presented and the illustration of the idea. Writers often say explicitly which things are examples by using words like “for example,” “is shown by” and other connectors.

c) Description – We use the description pattern to explain what something looks like. Start your paragraph with a topic sentence that identifies what you will describe. Then provide a part by part practical description giving readers precise details about the size, shape, color, function or other relevant information. Your description may also include any special features.

d) Comparison/Contrast – This pattern for organizing the ideas can show readers the similarities (comparison) and the differences (contrasts) between objects, plans, locations or other items. Before two or more items can be compared, they must be members of the same class and the criteria for comparison must be established. In a single paragraph, you can show either similarities or differences or both. You can also use separate paragraphs for each subject.

Here we look at two ways the same topic sentence is supported by the **comparison/contrast** (CC) technique. (*From Tench & Thomson, "Communication for Technicians"*)

Topic sentence
Diabetics, dieters and other people interested in reducing the amount of sugar they consume have two choices of artificial sweetener: saccharin and aspartame.

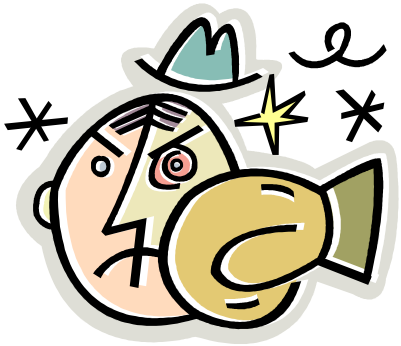
Saccharin is approximately 300 times sweeter than sugar. It has no calories. However, it has been linked to cancer in laboratory animals.

Aspartame is approximately 200 times sweeter than sugar. It has as many calories per gram as sugar. However, since it is so much sweeter, 1/200 g of aspartame can replace 1 g of sugar. Unlike saccharin, it has not been linked to cancer. [C/C technique A]

Calories: Saccharin is approximately 300 times sweeter than sugar. It has no calories. Aspartame is approximately 200 times sweeter than sugar. It has as many calories per gram as sugar. However, since it is so much sweeter, 1/200 g of aspartame can replace 1 g of sugar.

Safety: Saccharin has been linked to cancer in laboratory animals. Unlike saccharin, aspartame has not been linked to cancer. [C/C technique B]

e) Cause and Effect – The cause-effect relationship is commonly used in academic writing. If an argument begins with effects or results, the causes are the reasons that logically lead to those results. Note carefully this important distinction.



A B
CAUSE → EFFECT (A results in B; A causes B)
Dust causes the recording condition of disks to deteriorate.

B A
EFFECT ← CAUSE (B results from A; B is caused by A)
Deterioration in the recording condition of disks is caused by dust.

5.3 The Concluding Sentence

Think Through This

The concluding sentence at the end of the paragraph, if it exists, uses one or more of the following techniques:

a) summary
b) solution
c) prediction
d) conclusion

Example

There is a growing need for the integration of previously disparate applications of technology through a distributed networked infrastructure based on standard components and interfaces. This implies that attention must be given to the architecture of the network to support the interworking of various components. This infrastructure can then be used to further the use of technology in ways that significantly contribute to business operations. **It is against this backdrop that a new style of computing – network computing – is emerging.**

(*Adapted from Tapscott & Caston, "Paradigm Shift: The New Promise of Information Technology"*)

6 Revising for Readability

After writing the paragraph (and essay), it is important that you revise it. Besides the content of the message, readability is affected by

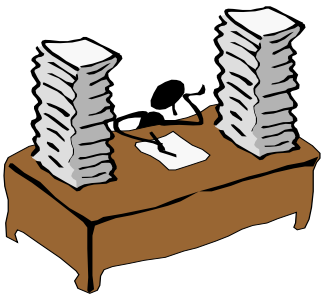
- word choice
- sentence structure
- unity of ideas
- coherence
- scrambled paragraphs

6.1 Word Choice

a) Technical Words – Language that is effective for certain readers and situations may be ineffective in other circumstances. If used in discussions with members of the same profession, technical words make communication more efficient. Because they lack training and experience, outsiders have difficulty understanding the technical words. When using words like RAM and ROM, make sure your audience knows what it means. When a technical word is used, it must be clearly defined.

b) Unnecessary Words – They clutter writing and make sentences long and difficult to read.

Examples of cluttered sentences



- There is a lot of discussion about the fact that frequent oil changes lead to long and trouble-free engine life. (20 words)

- Most of our electrical products seem designed, tested and built so that they are safe. However, sometimes, on occasions, a defect in the aforementioned product or improper use can cause hazardous situations to arise, resulting in electrical shock or fire. (43 words)

- It has been pointed out that valves can be classified in three types: stop valves, check valves or combination stop-check valves. (21 words)

One way to revise the sentences is to follow these three steps:

1. Determine the real subject of the sentence. (Usually you can ask yourself "Who is doing the action?" or "What is causing the action to occur?")
2. Determine the real verb. ("What is happening?")
3. Throw away the unnecessary words.

The sentences can be rewritten as follows:

- Frequent oil changes lead to long and trouble-free engine life. (10 words)

- Electrical products are designed, tested and built to be safe. However, sometimes a defect or improper use can result in electrical shock or fire. (24 words)

- Three types of valves are stop, check or combination stop-check. (10 words)

The following are more examples of how sentences could be written more concisely *(Adapted from Pfeiffer, William, "Technical Communication").*

Wordy: "The acquisition of the property was accomplished through long and hard negotiations."
Concise: "The property was acquired through long and hard negotiations."

Wordy: "Confirmation of the contract occurred yesterday."
Concise: "The contract was confirmed yesterday."

Wordy: "Replacement of the transmission was achieved only three hours before the race."
Concise: "The transmission was replaced only three hours before the race."

6.2 Sentence Structure

a) Active Voice – Active-voice sentences clearly state who or what the actor is and what the actor is doing. For that reason, most readers find the sentences written in the active voice easier to follow and understand than those written in the passive voice.

Example

Passive voice sentence: *New technology was developed to revolutionize high-speed air travel.*

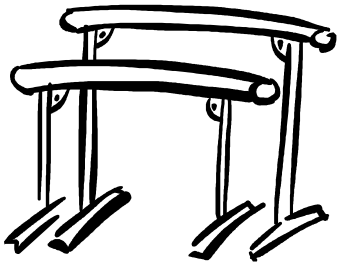
To rewrite this sentence in the active voice, we need to put in who or what developed the technology: *NASA developed the new technology to revolutionize high-speed air travel.*

Passive voice does have a place. When the identity of the actor is irrelevant (as is often the case in the Method section of a research report), use the passive voice.

Example

Seedling height was measured immediately after planting and at the end of one or two growing seasons. Percentage survival was calculated following the first and second growing season ... .

b) Parallelism – Write parallel ideas in parallel grammatical forms. To do otherwise introduces complication, as in this example: *Signs of a heart attack include a sensation of fullness, pain in the centre of the chest and when you feel a shortness of breath.*

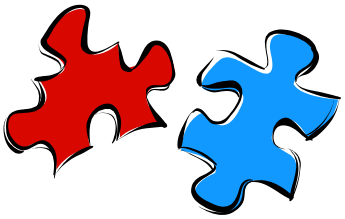


Without going into the different grammatical terminology, you recognize that the sentence has gone wrong. It is better to put all the symptoms in the same grammatical form: *Signs of a heart attack include feeling a sensation of fullness, having pain in the centre of the chest, fainting and being short of breath.*

Another example: *Stroke victims tend to be slow and disorganized when faced with problems and friends and family members are often surprised by their hesitant manner*. Rewrite it this way: *Stroke victims tend to be slow and disorganized when faced with problems and their hesitant manner often surprises friends and family members.*

6.3 Paragraph Unity

An important feature of an effective paragraph is unity. Unity means that the paragraph works as a whole: All the sentences in the paragraph relate to the topic sentence or explain the main idea.



6.4 Paragraph Coherence

Even when a paragraph is unified, and the topic sentence is supported, the paragraph can still sound choppy, that is, rough or interrupted. To make the paragraph smoother, the supporting sentences must be organized so that they cohere, or "stick together."

In writing, paragraph coherence means that one thought flows smoothly into the next and is connected to the one that comes before it. To achieve paragraph coherence, transitional or connecting words are used.

Some transitional words	
Addition	also, and, besides, furthermore, first, second, third, in addition, many, moreover, next, too
Cause/Effect	and so, accordingly, as a result, because of, consequently, due to, hence, if, on account of, since, therefore, thus
Comparison/ Contrast	but, conversely, equally, however, in contrast, in the same way, likewise, on the contrary, on the other hand, similarly, still, yet
Condition	although, even though, granted that, if, of course, provided that, to be sure, unless
Conclusion	at last, finally, in conclusion, in short, in summary, to conclude, therefore
Emphasis	above all, after all, again, indeed, in fact, of course, to repeat, unquestionably
Illustration	for example, for instance, in effect, in other words, in particular, specifically, that is, to illustrate

Place	alongside of, at this point, behind, below, here, in front of, next to, there, where
Time	afterwards, at the same time, at times, beforehand, eventually, currently, during, earlier, later, meanwhile, next, now, once, presently, soon then, until, when, while

Think through this…
Let's practise. In the blanks provided, add appropriate transitional words to tie together the sentences and ideas in the following text. Use the words given below.

on the other hand but or and
because in fact although however for instance

The software tools used to support the production of virtual environments fall into two categories: commercial products and research-produced products. For instance, the commercial products enable a new researcher to enter the field of virtual environments quickly, but they are quite limited and can quickly become frustrating for the serious researcher. Because commercial products exist primarily to support hardware sold by the software vendor or an allied hardware firm, they offer only a rudimentary environment for creative research in virtual environments.

On the other hand, the research-produced products require more work at the start for the new researcher, but they offer far more opportunities for advanced work. Research-produced software need not support a particular hardware configuration; in fact, it tends to accommodate a broad range of hardware configurations. However, although the code can be acquired virtually without cost, the new researcher might have to spend considerable time rewriting it to match hardware needs. Once the interface is smoothed out however, the researcher can create a virtual environment of unlimited richness.

6.5 Scrambled Paragraphs

If a paragraph is not unified, coherent and well-supported, the sentences in the paragraph could be mixed up, that is, scrambled. These sentences would need to be reassembled. The steps in reassembling a scrambled paragraph are

- read the scrambled sentences
- identify the topic sentence
- look for transitional words that indicate the supporting sentences
- locate the concluding sentence

See if you could 'unscramble' the following paragraph.

Tan De Kong was a Member of Parliament (MP) from 2000 to 2013 [TS]. Despite public recognition of his work as an MP, he was unsuccessful in his efforts to change some of the outdated public policies [5]. He was however recognized as an effective grassroots leader [4]. Finally, some of his calls for change received traction when the government decided to act on them [6]. In recognition of his efforts, he was nominated for public service awards, but he has never won [3]. A critic of the government, he was only one of a few voices in parliament who constantly argued for better and more effective public policies [2].

7 Developing a Successful Proposal

In most cases, proposals do not win contracts, but they can lose them in a heartbeat.
– David Pugh

Proposals are documents written to convince your readers to adopt an idea, product, or a service. They can be for your colleagues (in-house proposals), or clients (sales proposals), or for funding organizations for research and other activities (grant proposals). The following are some examples of an in-house proposal, sales proposal, and grant proposal *(Adapted from Pfeiffer, William, "Technical Communication").*

In-house proposal for computer drafting equipment

- Joe Allen, a graphics expert at the Los Angeles office, writes an in-house proposal to the drafting manager, Brendan Rodgers, in which he proposes that the company purchases a new computer drafting system. His proposal includes a schedule whereby the department can shift entirely to computer drafting in the next five years.

Sales proposal for work on wind turbine project

- A utility company in California plans to build ten giant turbines in a desert valley in the southern part of the state. The "free" power that is generated will help off-set the large increases in fuel costs for the company's other plants. Although the company has selected a turbine design and purchased the units, it needs to decide where to place them and what kinds of foundations to use. It sent out a request for proposal to companies that have experience with foundation and environmental engineering. Nigel Winterburn, an engineering manager at Winterburn Engineering, writes a proposal that offers to test the soils at the site, pinpoint the best locations for the heavy turbines, and design the most effective foundations.

Grant proposal for new engineering design

- Walrus Ltd., a British oil company, sometimes gives research and development funds to small companies. Such funding usually goes toward development of new technology or products in the field of petroleum engineering. Tom Ince, who works at Jerome Engineering, decides to apply for some of the funding. His proposed project, if successful, would provide a new piece of oil drilling safety equipment that would reduce the chance of offshore oil spills at production sites.

Proposals can be presented either in a short, simple format (informal proposal), or a longer more complicated format (formal proposal). Proposals can be both requested (solicited), or submitted without a request (unsolicited).

A proposal is

- An official written report.
- A detailed plan of action that has been drawn up, offering to provide a service or a product to someone.
- A legally binding written document to commission corporate and business projects. Usually costs and expenditure are itemized and quoted in these proposals.

Proposals are written for several reasons:

- Asking for funding.
- Presenting a feasibility study. (This means to see if something can be done or not.)
- Solving a problem.
- Expressing interest in a project.
- Asking for approval for a change or a new course of action.

To write a successful proposal, you must bear in mind the following guidelines.

a. Information

- You need to gather enough information on the topic. Strike a balance between presenting excessive details, or insufficient explanations. It may be useful to bear the following quote in mind when deciding how much and the kind of information to include.

  Common sense is the realized sense of proportion. – Mohandas Gandhi

- Information sources can be from brochures, reports or interviews.
- The information you provide must be factual, objective and complete enough to enable readers to act or to make a decision.

b. The good and the bad

- Be sure to provide all the advantages and disadvantages of the changes that you are proposing. Depending on the readers, you would not want your proposal to look too skewed so it loses credibility.

c. Appropriate illustrations

- Support your information with statistics and graphs to make it easier for your readers to understand your information.

d. Writing style

- Use a business writing style that is clear and easy to read.

e. Tone

- Be positive to create a good impression. It may make or break your proposal!

f. A professional look

- Use the report format for your proposal. The standard font to use is Times New Roman or Arial, 12 points, as this is the most readable font for hard copies.

Think Through This

A proposal is divided into sections for easy reading. In the table below, look at the function or characteristics of the sections given.

SECTION	FUNCTION or CHARACTERISTICS
Title Page	• It shows the title of the proposal, the recipient, the writer and the submission date.
Table of Contents	• It shows the pages and their corresponding page numbers.
List of Illustrations	• It lists the tables and diagrams in the proposal with their corresponding page numbers.
Abstract	• The abstract identifies the topic, purpose and scope but does not give detailed information. • The abstract summarizes the contents and the findings of the document, and is considered the most important part of the proposal. • It is written for those who are outside the area of expertise to recognize the starting point and the direction the proposal has taken.
Introduction	• It consists of the purpose, scope and background. • It can vary in length from one paragraph to several paragraphs.
Procedures	• This section shows in detail the implementation process. • It is written logically with each step clearly explained.
Equipment	• It lists in detail the equipment needed.
Budget/Costs	• It lists in detail the estimated costs. • Give estimated unit costs for each item to be purchased. If more than one unit is to be bought, remember to show the multiples as well.
Conclusion	• It emphasizes the benefits, results and advantages of the proposal. • It is based on the information proposed. • It is short – half to one page is sufficient.

Think Through This

1. Where does page numbering start? Are there any differences in the numbering system used?

a) Page numbering starts from the Table of Contents page.
b) Page numbers on the Table of Contents page and up to the Abstract page use Roman numerals: i, ii, iii, iv, etc.
c) All page numbers from the Introduction page onward are written using Arabic numerals: 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.

2. When tables and diagrams are used in the proposal, how are they treated?

a) Number all tables (Table 1, Table 2, etc.) and diagrams (Fig. 1, Fig. 2, Fig. 3, etc.).
b) Label all tables and diagrams by giving them a title.
c) State which page the table or diagram appears on.

3. When do you write the Abstract and what can be used to guide you?

a) Write the abstract last, after the proposal is completed.
b) Use the Table of Contents as a guide.

When writing proposals, it would be useful to bear in mind the following qualities of great proposals *(Adapted from Pugh, David, "Powerful Proposals: How to Give Your Business the Winning Edge").*

- ***Boilerplate***

Boilerplate is the amount of recycled material included in a proposal. It consists of standardized text (resumes, experienced lists, project descriptions, policies and procedures, standard methods and equipment, equipment descriptions or specifications) and visuals. Whole sections of proposals may be recycled from one proposal to another. While this makes proposal writing faster and less expensive, it may be better to customize your proposal for the client whenever you can.

- ***Customer Focus***

A good proposal focuses on the buyer. It links what it has to the buyer's goals, needs, and requirements. It provides a problem-solving roadmap for the buyer rather than an advertisement for the seller's equipment and capabilities.

- ***Creative Page Design***

Presentation counts for a lot. Good page layouts and visuals would enable a proposal to be viewed more favorably. Good design knowledge must be brought to creating elegant proposals, to bring the reader's attention to the right places, emphasize what is important, and make his comprehension of the offer and solution easier.

- ***A Compelling Story***

A great proposal tells a compelling story of the offer in the context of what the buyer needs in order to succeed. It engages the buyer by focusing on him and his challenges and needs. It then offers a solution, convincingly.

- ***Executive Summary***

Readers may be busy professionals. A good proposal includes a separate, full color, brochure-style executive summary that is well-designed, customer-focused, and succinct in telling the story of the offer.

- ***Ease of Evaluation***

A good proposal is easy to evaluate. It is reader-friendly, and evaluators have no difficulty finding what they need or understanding how the proposed solutions address their challenges. A good proposal is easy to evaluate because their writers have made the relevant information easy to find and score.

A good proposal answers the following questions.

Why Us?

What is your positive differentiation? What is it that you offer that is different and better, relative to buyer's needs and other proposals? For instance, how useful are your team members' qualifications and accomplishments placed in the context of the buyer? What relevant information and/or projects can you share that will enable your customer to act, to opt for your proposal?

Why Not Them?

What are your offer's advantages over your competitors' disadvantages (e.g. in terms of approaches, products, services, and track record, etc.)? Help your buyer make an informed decision.

So What?

Buyers don't buy what it is; they buy what it does for them. They buy benefits, not features. How does your proposal and solution benefit the client? For instance, does your proposal benefit the client in terms of proactive problem-solving, lesser learning curve, great methodologies, lower risks in terms of budget and schedule, etc.?

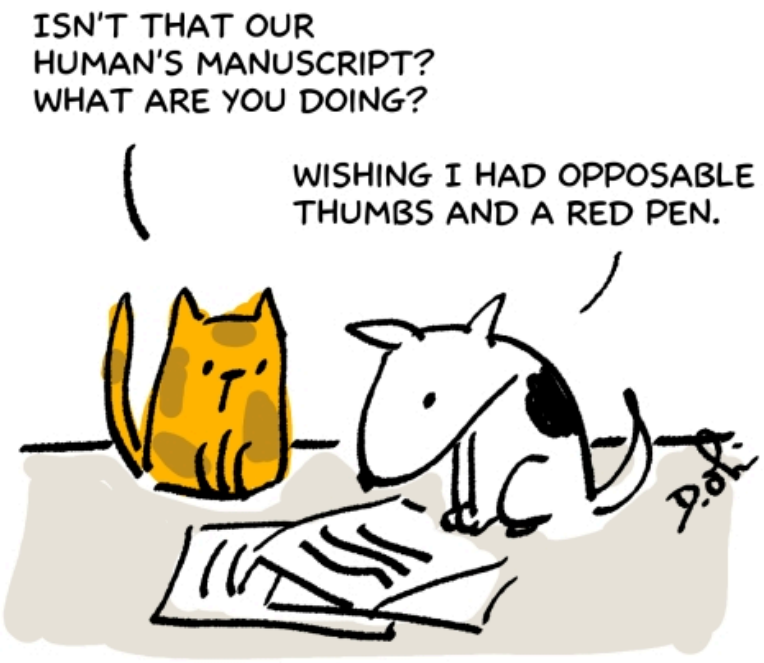
How So?
Great proposals include proofs and substantiation for all of its major claims. For instance, if your proposal claims to be able to reduce production costs by 15% with your process engineering efficiencies, be prepared to explain how.

Overall, what must I take note of when writing proposals?

- ✓ Proposals are documents that aim to convince readers.
- ✓ In proposals, you are writing to convince someone within or outside of your organization to adopt an idea, a product, or a service.
- ✓ Proposals can be either informal or formal, depending on length, complexity, or reader preference.

In proposal writing, these basic guidelines must be followed:

a) Plan before you write;
b) Use letter or memo format;
c) Make text visually appealing;
d) Organize well;
e) Put important details in the body;
f) Give special attention to establishing need in the body;
g) Focus attention in your conclusion;
h) Use attachments for less important details;
i) Edit carefully.



SAMPLE SECTIONS OF A PROPOSAL

(a) Title page

PROPOSAL FOR SETTING UP A CAMPUS RADIO

For
George Tan
Principal
National Polytechnic

From
Ms Tricia Tay
Student Development Officer

15 March 2013

- The title is clearly stated.
- Use **bold** type.
- Definite article "the" is dropped.

(b) Table of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations

List of Illustrations: *If you have a few tables and diagrams, the list of illustrations can be placed under the Table of Contents. However, if you have many illustrations, use a new page.*

(c) Abstract

The objective of the proposal is to set up a campus radio in National Polytechnic. The reasons for it are to improve the social and creative environment, and to increase the well-being of both students and staff. The initial budget will be about $75,500 excluding other costs like building of a soundproof studio, hiring of a sound technician as well as setup costs and other service charges. However, relevant training will be provided on areas such as presentation skills, writing for radio and understanding of music flow. Through the medium of music, relevant information like a calendar of events, public announcements and others will be broadcast to staff and students.

(d) Introduction

This report proposes the setting up of a campus radio in National Polytechnic. The radio will serve as a means of passing on relevant and pertinent information to both the student population as well as to the staff. Through the medium of music, relevant information like a calendar of events, public announcements and others can be broadcast to staff and students. This will create a vibrant atmosphere within the polytechnic.

Purpose

The objective of the proposal is to set up a campus radio in National Polytechnic. It will improve the social and creative environment, and increase the well-being of both students as well as staff.

Scope

In this proposal, a description of the proposed activity for the setting up of a campus radio is presented, followed by sections concerning broadcast license, broadcast schedule, manpower requirements, programs, equipment, budget and finally, conclusion.

- The **purpose** is explicitly and clearly stated in a separate paragraph: “The objective of the proposal is to set up a campus radio in National Polytechnic.”
- The **scope** sets the parameters of the proposal. It makes a list of the sections to be covered and is briefly written.

(e) Procedures

BROADCAST LICENSE

Although the campus radio will be a wired system, the polytechnic will still have to apply for a broadcast license.

BROADCAST SCHEDULE

To maximize the campus radio, it should be operated from Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily although the broadcast hours can be extended on Fridays to 8 p.m. as a weekend special. It will not be operated during semester and vacation breaks.

MANPOWER

As the radio is broadcast nine hours a day, a three-hourly on-air shift is proposed, making it three shifts a day, with a total of 15 shifts a week. Therefore, a minimum of 15 students (and staff who may want to try their hand at broadcasting) will be needed to present/anchor a shift once a week.

The selection process will include a voice test for the following:

- Vocal quality
- Diction
- Articulation
- Personality

Further training which includes the following will be provided to those selected:

- Presentation skills
- Writing for radio
- Understanding of music flow

A technician will be needed to ensure that the equipment is working and well-maintained.

PROGRAMS

The campus radio will be a music station playing adult contemporary music, with only contemporary pop and rock music to be played during the lunch break hour and after 5 p.m. All music played will be vetted by the lecturer in charge. Information segments will also be included during the broadcast. These will include the following slots:

- Diary of polytechnic Events (and others relevant to the audience)
- Interviews with students/lecturers
- Latest information on student activities/courses/talks/seminars
- Music requests
- Public announcements and others

(f) Equipment and Budget/Costs

Table 1 contains a list of the equipment needed to set up a basic studio and a breakdown of the estimated costs.

Table 1: Cost Estimates

	Equipment	***Unit Cost (Estimate)***	***Total Cost***
a)	a U-shaped panel	$5,000	$5,000
b)	a 12-channel mixer	$26,000	$26,000
c)	a minimum of 2 CD players	$5,000	$10,000
d)	a cassette player (with remote facility)	$1,000	$1,000
e)	2 microphones	$1,000	$2,000
f)	2 sets of headphones	$500	$1,000
g)	an amplifier	$1,000	$1,000
h)	2 speakers	$2,000	$4,000
i)	telos equipment (for 2 phone lines)	$2,000	$4,000
j)	equipment for off-trans recording	$1,500	$1,500
k)	cabling works	$18,000	$18,000
l)	purchase of 100 CDs (for startup)	$20	$2,000
	Total		**$75,500**

(g) Conclusion

The setting up of a campus radio in National Polytechnic will help to improve the social and creative environment at the polytechnic. It will also create a vibrant atmosphere, as well as give students another avenue to express themselves, which is through the medium of music. Although the initial stages of setting up the radio may be time-consuming and somewhat costly, the students should be able to run and manage the station effectively with relevant training provided. With effective programming, the station is also a means of passing information to both staff and students.