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2-day Grant-Writing workshop

Programme

Day 1

- | | |
|-------|--|
| 10:00 | Welcome and Introductions The grant-writing game |
| 10:45 | Coffee |
| 11:00 | What makes a good grant application? |
| 12:00 | Outlining and testing the research project. |
| 13:00 | Lunch |
| 13:30 | Using the Outline to write. |
| 14:00 | Writing the perfect opening sentence. |
| 14:45 | Coffee |
| 15:00 | Writing Key Sentences |
| 15:30 | Using Key sentences to structure a case for support. |
| 16:00 | Close |

Day 2

- | | |
|-------------|---------|
| 08:30-12:30 | Surgery |
| 12:30 | Lunch |
| 13:00-17:00 | Surgery |

Overview

The workshop is designed start you working on an extremely efficient approach to writing a research project grant, such as a research council standard grant, that makes it possible to produce a case for support **in 2 weeks**. The case for support is the central component of a grant application. All the rest of the information in the application should derive from the case for support.

If you have a fundable project in mind at the start of the workshop, you should have a rough draft of the skeleton of the case for support, in the form of **10 key sentences**, by the end of the first day. If you don't have a fundable project in mind at the start of the day you will learn what you need to design a fundable project and you will practise the skills of writing the 10 key sentences.

Day 2 will be a surgery to discuss your key sentences or draft applications.

Preparation

There are three things you need to do to prepare for the workshop.

- First, it is vital for several of the exercises that you come prepared to talk about a specific research project. It can be a project that has already been done, or it can be one that you plan, or hope, to do. You don't have to have anything written, but you must have the project in your head. This could be a project for which you are preparing to apply for funding. It could also be a project that you have completed - a paper, a series of papers or even your PhD.
- Please come prepared to participate actively in discussions.
- Please come prepared to write. There will be some writing exercises. How you write is immaterial. The important thing is that you are prepared to write, whether it be on a tablet, a laptop or on paper. Writing is a behaviour and, as in all behaviours, skill depends on practice. It is only by practising that you will develop the relevant writing skills.

If you would like to know about other events, [visit the events page](#).

Andrew Derrington

Research-Grant Writing Workshop

School of Engineering University of

Exeter

Andrew Derrington

5 January 2016

Contents

I. What Makes a Good Grant Application?

- 1. A Good Grant Application is Designed for the Decision Process.**
- 2. What do Funders want to Know?**
 - 2.1. The case for support must answer your Funder's questions.
- 3. How do Funders make decisions?**
 - 3.1. A good grant application makes it easy for them.
 - 3.1.1. It is easy to find the detail.
 - 3.1.2. It is easy to speed-read the case for support.
 - 3.1.3. It is easy to understand and remember the case for support.
 - 3.1.4. It is easy to reconstruct the case for support.
 - 3.1.5. Different versions of the Case are consistent.

II. The Perfect First Sentence

- 4. What should the first sentence say?**
- 5. Gathering information for a first sentence**
- 6. Writing the First Sentence**
- 7. Compare Sentences**

III. Drafting Key Sentences

- 8. Get the Raw Material**

9. 'We need to know' and 'This will tell us' (3 or 4 of each)

10. Sentence 2: Importance Sentence

11. Sentence 6

12. Sentence 1

13. Sentence 10

Part I.

What Makes a Good Grant Application?

- 1. A Good Grant Application is Designed for the Decision Process.**
- 2. What do Funders want to Know?**

Funders have four questions in mind

- 1. IS THE PROJECT IMPORTANT?**
 - Does the project meet the funder's priorities?
 - Direct Outcomes (discoveries)
 - Indirect Outcomes (training, career development, mobility...)
- 2. WILL THE PROJECT BE SUCCESSFUL?**
 - Will the project produce the direct outcomes?
 - Will the outcomes be put to use?
 - Will the project produce good indirect outcomes?
- 3. ARE THE APPLICANTS COMPETENT?**
 - Is the applicant capable of carrying out the project?
 - Is the institution capable of supporting it?
- 4. WOULD A GRANT BE VALUE for MONEY?**
 - Are the resources requested Necessary
 - and Sufficient
 - and Proportionate

2.1. The case for support must answer your Funder's questions.

The application has to answer the four questions.

- IMPORTANCE (evidence)
 - Evidence about direct outcomes
 - * Literature review
 - Evidence about indirect outcomes
 - * Information about the project, institutions, and investigators
- SUCCESS (project details)
 - Map the research activities onto the outcomes
 - Describe impact and dissemination plans
- COMPETENCE (evidence)
 - Evidence that the team has the skills to produce the outcomes.
 - * Appropriate publications.
 - Evidence that the PI can deliver and the institution can support the project.
 - * Track record
 - * Assurances
- VALUE for MONEY (project details)
 - Describe how grant resources will be used in the project.
 - Describe how institutional resources will be used in the project.

Which question do you start with?

- IMPORTANCE?
 - Pick an important question
 - * Start the literature review
 - *

That's how you write a zombie grant...

Always start with the competence question

- It's not what you can do, it's what you can provide evidence of your competence to do.
- Pick research activities for which you can demonstrate your competence
 - Cite appropriate quality publications showing ALL relevant Skills
- Design a project that you can give evidence that you can deliver
 - Successful completion of projects up to that point on the cost ladder
 - * £1K / £10K / £100K / £1M / £10M
 - And the complexity ladder
 - * Student / RA / Post Doc / Team / International network

3. How do Funders make decisions?

3.1. A good grant application makes it easy for them.

The Decision: who decides?

- Committee of successful researchers
 - Very busy people
 - Very successful
 - * Have their own grants
 - * And research groups
 - * And jobs
 - Not knowledgeable about your particular research area.
- May have 'user' representation
- Supported by secretariat

The Decision: what information do they have?

- Applications
 - Usually a set of 50-100 per meeting.
 - Arrive 3-6 weeks before meeting.
 - Everybody delays reading them as long as possible.
- Expert referees' reports
 - Written reports with evaluation and score.
 - Usually 2-5 per application
 - Usually arrive before the meeting but often after the applications
 - Often conflicting
- Designated members' reports
 - Oral report by 2 or 3 members who have read the application.
 - Usually lasts < 5 minutes

The Decision: what is the process?

- Members with conflict of interest leave the room.
- Designated members report on the proposal
 - Usually less than 5 minutes
 - Who, what, why, how, outcomes, strengths, weaknesses, summary of referees, how important and exciting, suggested score
 - One person may have to do this for 10 or more grants in a day.
 - Probably based on 30-60 minutes preparation.
- Discussion by all members of the committee.
 - Even though some of them may be reading it for the first time during the discussion.
 - * They will probably have read the summary beforehand.
- All members in the discussion can influence the score.
 - No matter how little they know.
 - And how little time they have spent reading your proposal.

The Decision: what are the implications

- The decision is based on a 5 minute talk
 - by someone relatively ignorant about your research area
 - who spends less than an hour learning from your proposal
 - and has to present up to 10 other proposals the same day
 - plus the contribution and votes from people who know even less and spend <10 minutes reading it
- What requirements does this impose on the case for support?
 - Easy to Find the detail quickly (Referee).
 - Easy to understand the Logic (Designated Member).
 - Easy to Speed-read (Committee Member).
 - Memorable and Distinctive (Designated Member).
- These properties depend on the style and the structure

3.1.1. It is easy to find the detail.

Key Sentences make it easy to find the detail.

Key statements define the application

- Outcome
- Importance
- Things we need to know to achieve the outcome
- Project summary
- Intermediate outcomes
- Dissemination plans

Tailor the Key Sentences to the Funder's Assessment

Use key statements to structure the case for support

- They introduce the detail
 - that convinces the reader

3.1.2. It is easy to speed-read the case for support.

Paragraph structure for speed readability

- Message at the top of paragraph (ASSERT then JUSTIFY)
 - First sentence of para ASSERTS (message sentence)
 - Remainder of para JUSTIFIES
 - * This is where you cite literature
 - * This is how you avoid citing too much literature.
- White space above each paragraph
- Clear, consistent layout
 - Headings & Subheadings convey structure
 - Introduction summarises the case for support
 - Consistent terminology

3.1.3. It is easy to understand and remember the case for support.

Internal structure and detail makes it memorable

- Repetition is good.
 - Important things should be said several times
 - Always use same words
 - * Repeat key sentences in summary, introduction and as topic sentences.
- Use lists of 3 items

- Always use same list order when you repeat the lists
- Use links & signposts
 - Link announces next list element
 - Signpost points to corresponding element in subsequent list
- Label list elements with 'tag phrases'
 - Use labels to link related elements in different parts
 - * 'We need to know' + tag phrase + signpost
 - * 'This will tell us' + tag phrase
- Create the Summary from the Case for Support
 - Re-use key sentences
 - Keep the order consistent

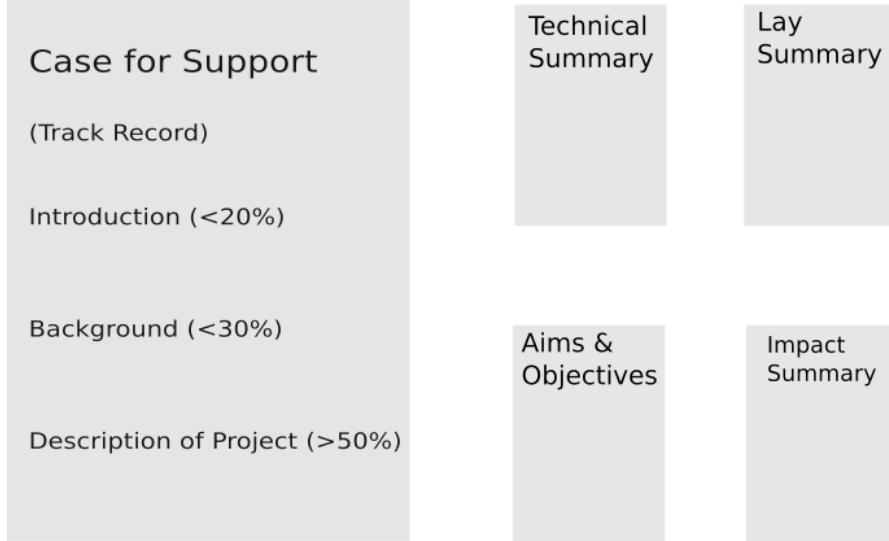
3.1.4. It is easy to reconstruct the case for support.

Clear structure makes it easy to reconstruct the Case

1. Introduction - 10 Key Statements
 - Gets attention & sets out the whole case in brief
 - Outcome and its Importance (1&2)
 - 3 Aims we need for the Outcome (3-5)
 - Project overview (6)
 - 3 sub-projects that deliver each Aim (Objectives) (7-9)
 - Say how findings will be disseminated (10)
2. Background - sets out the need for the project (1-5 + Evidence))
 - States the outcome and gives evidence that it is important.
 - Breaks it down into 3 steps.
 - Explains why we need each step.
3. Description of the Project (6-10 + Detail)
 - General research approach/methods
 - Sub-projects that deliver each step in order
 - What will be done, how, when, by whom, with what resources
 - Which resources will be provided by the grant
 - What this will tell us and how findings will be derived
 - How findings will be disseminated

3.1.5. Different versions of the Case are consistent.

Different versions of the Case should be consistent



- Use key sentences and tag phrases
 - to provide common structure, and
 - to link
- Maintain structure and order

Resources

- Funders' Websites
 - Description of remit & application process
 - * Tells you what they think is important
 - Summaries of funded projects.
 - * Examples of what they think is important.
 - * Examples of successful PIs
- The Research Funding Toolkit (book)
 - supplemented by this blog:- <http://researchfundingtoolkit.org/blog/>
 - Stuff tends to appear first here:- <http://parkerderrington.com/blog/>

Part II.

The Perfect First Sentence

4. What should the first sentence say?

What should the first sentence say?

What is the first thing the reader wants to know?

- What can you tell the reader that will make them want to read on?
- They will have about 100 other applications they could be reading
- And a TV.

5. Gathering information for a first sentence

Gathering information for a first sentence

Ask your neighbour about their project. Try to understand and remember:-

- What will the project achieve?
- Why would that achievement be important?
- How will the project achieve it?
- Why would they be a good person to carry out the project?

After 3 minutes, change roles and repeat.

6. Writing the First Sentence

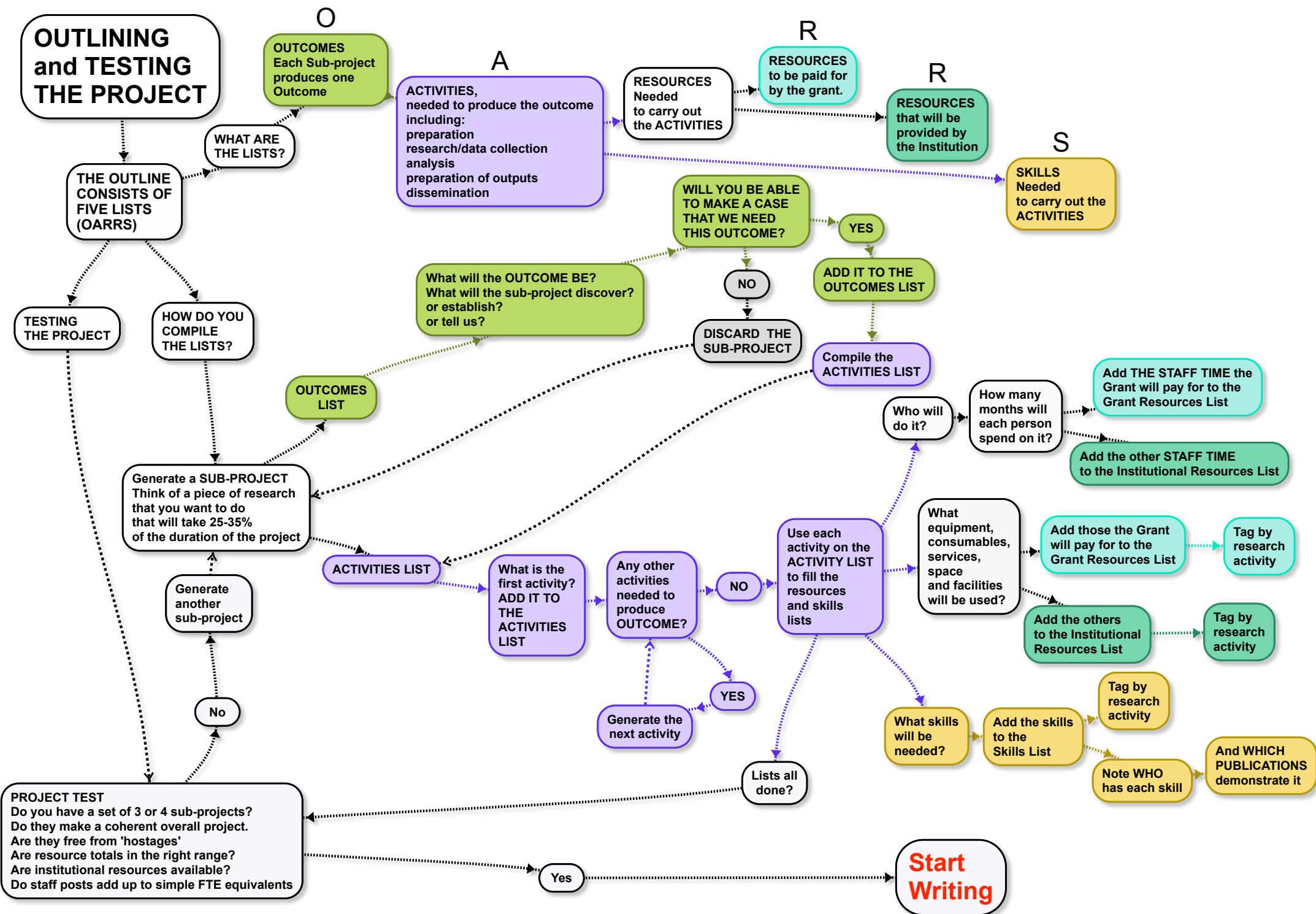
Write a first sentence

1. Imagine that you are trying to persuade a committee to invest in your neighbour's project.
 - Write a single sentence that will convince them to do so.
 - You have 2 minutes.
2. Imagine that you are trying to persuade a committee to invest in your project.
 - Write a single sentence that will convince them to do so.
 - You have 2 minutes.

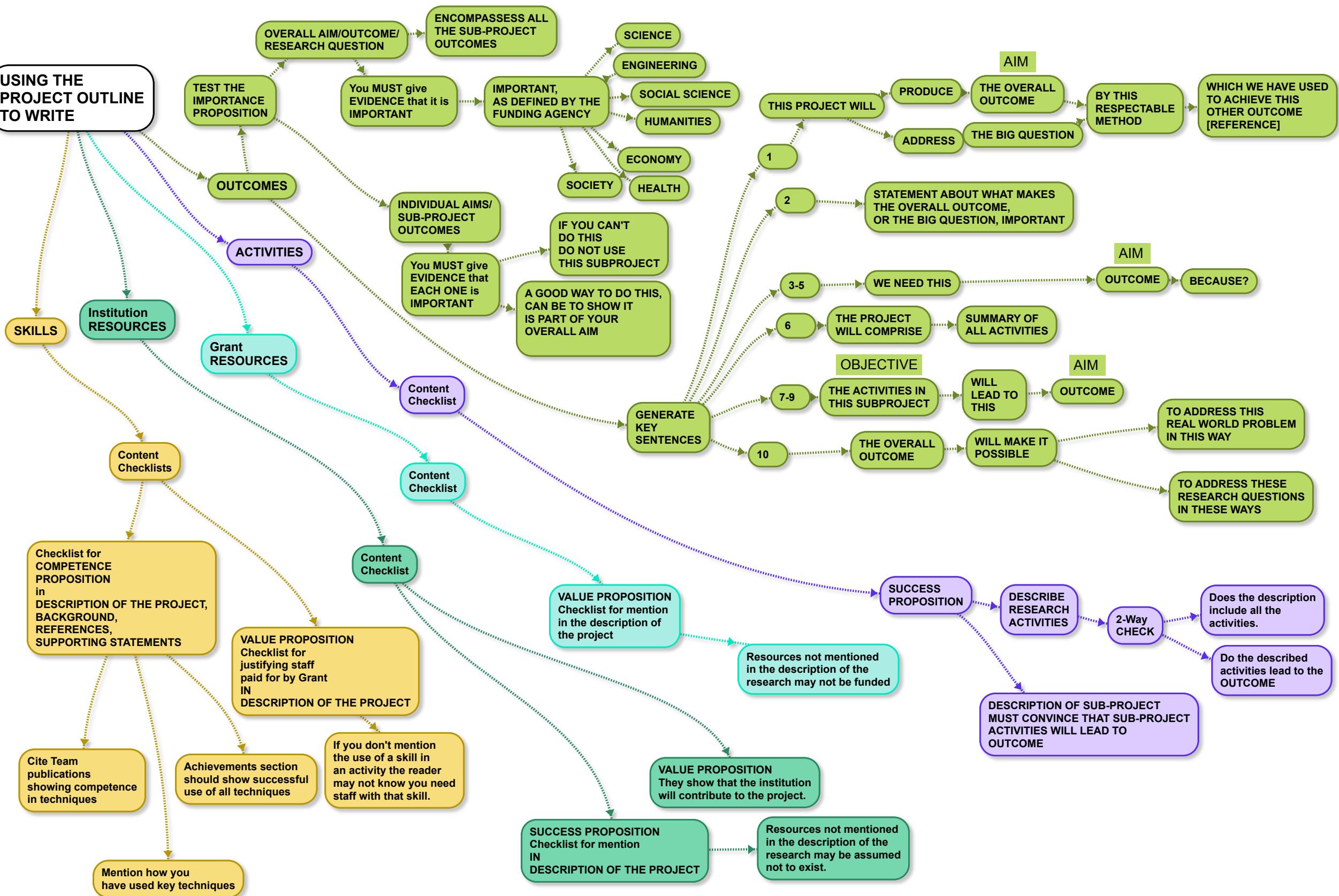
7. Compare Sentences

Comparing Sentences

- Discuss the first sentences on your table
 - Pick the best.
 - Pick someone to read it.



USING THE PROJECT OUTLINE TO WRITE



Part III.

Drafting Key Sentences

8. Get the Raw Material

Questions to gather raw material.

Try to answer each question in not more than 40 words

1. What will be the overall outcome of the project?
 - Is there evidence that the methods will work?
 - Have you used the methods to produce high quality outputs?
2. What is the significance of this outcome - what will it allow us to do that we can't do now and who wants to do that?
3. Which priorities of the funder does the project meet, and how?
4. What will each sub-project achieve (40 words each)?
5. Describe the research approach of the project in 40 words.
6. What is the approach for each sub-project (40 words each)?
7. Why do we need each sub-project? (up to 40 words for each)?
8. What must be done to maximise the benefit from the project?

Use your answers to write the key sentences.

9. 'We need to know' and 'This will tell us' (3 or 4 of each)

'We need to know' and 'This will tell us' (3 of each)

- Sentences 3, 4 and 5 'We need to know' express need for sub-project outcomes.
 - Introduces a subsection of the Background.
 - *We need to [know or establish or develop]+[sub-project outcome] because.....*
- Sentences 7, 8 and 9 'This will tell us' state how you will achieve the sub-project outcomes.
 - Introduces a subsection of the description of the project.
 - *We will [do the relevant research] in order to [know or establish or develop] + [subproject outcome].*
- Write a set of 3 or 4 matched pairs of 'We need to know' and 'this will tell us' sentences.
- If your outcomes make a coherent set, you can try sentence 1 and sentence 2.

10. Sentence 2: Importance Sentence

Sentence 2: Importance Sentence

1. Use the answers to these questions to say why the project is important.
 - a) What is the significance of the project outcome - what will it allow us to do that we can't do now and who wants to do that?
 - b) Which named priorities of your funder does the project contribute to, and how?

11. Sentence 6

Sentence 6

- Sentence 6 introduces the introductory part of the description of the project.
 - to write it, summarise the research approach of the project in about 40 words.

12. Sentence 1

Sentence 1: the elevator pitch

Sentence 1 can have 3 parts:-

1. What the project will achieve.
2. The general research approach
3. An example of your success using that approach previously.

13. Sentence 10

Sentence 10

- Sentence 10 introduces your discussion of what will happen after the research is complete
- It will depend to a certain extent on the nature of the claim for importance in sentence 2.
 - State in about 40 words what you will do to maximise the benefit from the project.

Structuring the case for support



Presenter



Andrew Derrington has in-depth experience of the research funding process. He obtained his first research grant, a Beit Memorial Fellowship for Medical Research, while he was writing his PhD. His research was continuously funded by fellowships, project and programme grants for the next 30 years. He served on research grant committees for The Science and Engineering Research Council, the Medical Research Council and the Wellcome Trust. His book, *The Research Funding Toolkit*, which he co-wrote with Jacqueline Aldridge, research manager at Kent Business School, is the definitive guide to grant writing for early career academics and research professionals. It is based on Andrew's analysis of how grants committees make funding decisions.

Andrew has worked in eight Universities including two in the world top ten. He has led a School of Biology in a Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering. He has been Dean of a Faculty of Social Sciences and Pro Vice Chancellor of a Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Andrew has also worked as a journalist. Over several years he wrote two successful columns in the Financial Times. *The Nature of Things* covered science – from astrophysics to zoology. *Psych Yourself Up* was a guide to the different psychotherapies available in the UK.

Testimonials

Andrew blends easy authority and extensive experience with humour and approachability. The result is a workshop full of practical, memorable advice on how to compete more successfully for research funding.

Professor Peter Clegg, Institute Institute of Ageing and Chronic Disease, University of Liverpool

I attended one of Andrew's workshops when I was a senior lecturer. The hands on advice about how to structure my applications in a really appealing fashion enabled me to win a grant of nearly £600K the next year. I still implement the advice that I received in that workshop, and pass it down to junior colleagues. I find that Andrew's advice has a high success rate!

Prof Theresa Gannon, University of Kent

I still use the tips you gave me for my successful Wellcome SRF application. Your advice on "12 key sentences" is spot-on and helps people focus on the aspects of the proposal that are critical to success instead of getting bogged down in reams of text.

Prof Mark Baxter, Mount Sinai School of Medicine

Andrew's grant-writing workshops teach you how to convince the world that it needs your research. They are the most useful training events I have ever attended. His advice about how to sell the big idea without compromising on the science was critical to the success of our £9.3 million ESRC application.

Prof Julian Pine, University of Liverpool

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