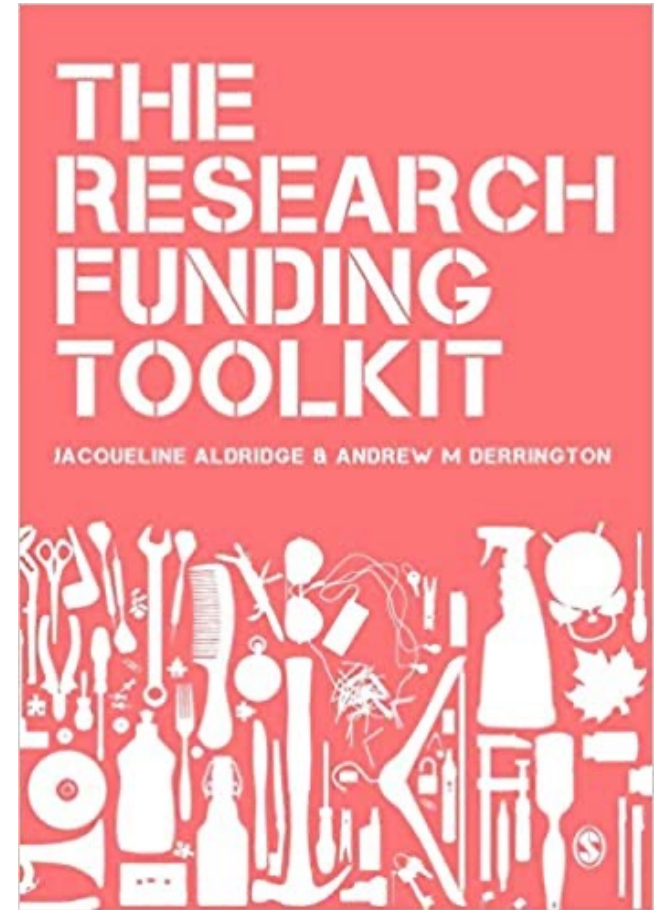# Professional Development
Write a Research Proposal
Week 4: Useful tips for Language and style

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Useful Reading

- Much of the material comes from chapter 10 of this book.

- Some excellent tips on *"how to write for funding agencies"*

- Read / scan chapter 10 of this book.

- Proposals need to be
    - Easy to read
    - Easy to understand
    - Convincing

THE RESEARCH FUNDING TOOLKIT

JACQUELINE ALDRIDGE & ANDREW M DERRINGTON

The 6 "core" writing techniques

- Assert-justify:
  - Tell the readers the point, and then give detail

- Priming:
  - Give readers advance information so they accept the key arguments later

- Signposting:
  - Tell readers what information is coming.

- Linking:
  - How to create connected arguments across the document

- Labelling:
  - Demonstrate consistent and logical project structure

- Summary:
  - Create a strong, high-level, project summary
  - not needed for your proposal.

Assert-Justify

- This is a very useful technique in research proposals (see example 30, page 120)

- Opposite to traditional "argue-conclude" model used in papers.

- Advantage is that:
  - Speed-readers pick up the main messages very quickly
  - Detail-readers can read on.
  - Assertions can be lifted out and used in a high level summary (some proposals require a high-level summary)

Priming (we have a problem)

- Give reader evidence that will make them likely to agree with your proposal. This can seem subtle at first…

- **Success: Prime your important question(s)**:
  - E.g. make the reader worried that there is an *important question* that needs answering before you state what the problem actually is ("we have a problem")
  - How many people are affected?
  - How much money is lost because of something?
  - How is the environment affected?
  - *By providing evidence for why we need to know the answers you are priming the "this project is the solution".*

- **Success: Prime your *research plan***
  - E.g. give evidence that points to a lack of understanding,
  - Or that there are inconsistencies that require investigation in a certain way.
- **Competence**:
  - tell the reader that the investigator has necessary skills to to deliver.

Priming (this project is the solution)

- You need to convince your referee that the project is good value. In funding proposals there will be a separate "resource" document, but it is important to recognise you cannot separate the two… you must prime the reader so they accept your resource requirement

- **Resources / Value**:
    - In the research plan mention what the requested resources are used for.
    - Try to weave in why. You don't need to mention costs here.

Signposting

- More explicit that priming.

- Priming is giving information so reader makes up their mind - subtle.

- Signposting can be used to tell a reader what information is coming next:
  - E.g. in this section we…
  - … we now move to explaining….

- Or to summarise information:
  - …these experiments assess the importance of…

Linking

- The sections of the proposal should link together effectively.

- Straightforward linking:
  - This will be done in approach 2…
  - Approach 1 does address …; in order to address … we propose another study (approach 2)
  - The results of approach 1 informs the starting assumptions in approach 2.

Labelling

- Consistent labelling should be used throughout.

- A good way to do this is to label descriptions with "tag-phrases". '

- Tag-phrases' are also useful for key technical terms that may challenge non-specialists.
  - E.g. you can label different approaches with shorter tag-phrases and refer to them throughout.
  - You can ask questions in the 'we have a problem' section, give them tags, and then refer to the same tags in your research plan.

- This gives the impression of a well-planned project.

Main points

- Adopting the techniques below goes a long way to creating an 'easy to read' proposal
  - Assert-Justify
  - Linking
  - Labelling

- Further points:
  - Use adjectives sparingly (e.g. exciting; significant; profound) – focus on evidence instead.
  - Try not to overuse typography to emphasise text
  - Use bullet-points and numbered lists "Chunking"
  - Use short paragraphs – six lines maximum
  - Use short sentences – 20 words are too long
  - Use present tense "this project asks" instead of "this project is asking the following question"
  - Repetition is good.

- You should have a rough idea of what your research proposal will be about and may have thought about activities too. Discuss in groups where you will use:
  - Assert-justify
  - Labelling using tag-phrases
  - Priming, Linking, and signposting