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Being Persuasive

Grant Writing Workshop, May 13, 2016

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Overview of agenda

- The framework: 4 key propositions; goal and objectives
- The skeleton: Structural outline;10 key sentences
- The writing: Write what you know; assert–justify style; the order of writing
- The adapting: Your competition's specific review process and application format
- The review: *Before* submitting

- http://www.researchfundingtoolkit.org/resources/

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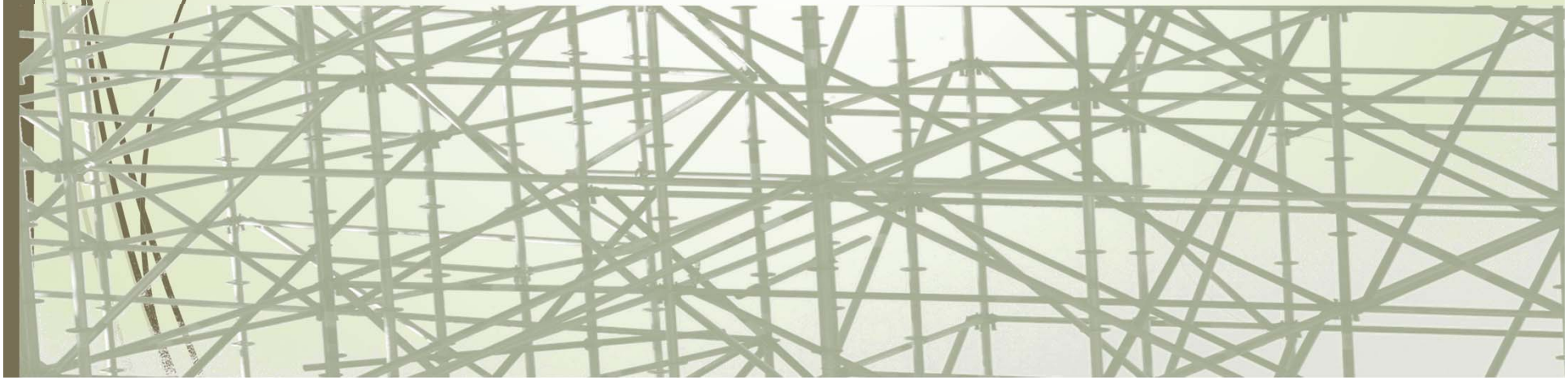
The Framework

- **Activity:** *Are you ready to write?*
- 4 key propositions to shape all grant applications: *importance, success, value, competence*
- **Activity:** *Define your goal*
- State your goal and objectives
- **Activity:** *What do we need to know? Define your objectives*



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Activity

Are you ready to write?

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Are you ready to write?

- Have you identified an area and a topic?
- Is the basic infrastructure available?
- Do you have publications that show you have the skills needed?
- Which funding agency are you applying to?
- Is your topic within the scope of the funding agency?
- Is your topic a priority for the funding agency?

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Four key propositions

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Four key propositions
Importance

Proposal deserves funding because

- question is **important**
  - Why is the question important?
  - Why is it important to answer it now?
- question is **relevant** and **important to the funder**
- **literature or current events** demonstrate this question is important and has not been asked before.
- **your knowledge users** think the question is important or beneficial

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Four key propositions
Success

Project can realistically answer your important question

- **Describe** research project
- **Explain** methods and why they are the best approach
- **Show** how the project answers the question
- **Explain** what will be done with the answer
- **Show** that you know who needs that answer

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Four key propositions
Value

Project is worth spending money on

- **Demonstrate** that the resources you request are
  - necessary and sufficient
  - appropriate to the scale of the problem
- **Explain**
  - *HOW* resources are used in the project
  - *WHY* the resources are needed
- **Show** that you have **all other** resources needed

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Four key propositions
Competence

You and your team can do this project (PI, team, institutions)

- **Explain** your contributions to this question
- **Demonstrate** how your publications use the research methods
- **Explain** your access to essential facilities or institutional supports
- **Explain** *why* and *how* each team member is essential
- **Predict** possible problems; explain how you will handle them

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Activity

Define your overall goal

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Goal versus objectives

Goal	Objectives
overarching principle	specific steps
broad	narrow
general intentions	precise
intangible	tangible
abstract	concrete
difficult to measure	measurable

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Activity

What do we need to know?

Identify your objectives and sub-projects

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2 to 3 sub-projects shape and focus your larger research project

1. **List** activities you must undertake to answer your research question. For example:

Interviews	**Archive visits**	**Desk research**
Calculations	**Experiments**	**Field trips**
Surveys	**Developing community relationships**	**Practice-as-research activities**

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2 to 3 sub-projects shape and focus your larger research project

2. **Categorize** your potential activities. For example:

Experiments or interviews with different categories of participants		
Visits to different countries or archives		
Varying experimental conditions	**Distinct categories or data sources**	**Phases or stages of research activity**
Diverse themes that could emerge from your data		
Different historical periods or sites of investigation		

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2 to 3 sub-projects shape and focus your larger research project

3. **Group** your activities into 2 to 3 categories.

   Write a sub-question for each category.

   These sub-questions in turn generate the sub-projects.

- **Label** each of these 'need to know' things
- **Use** this wording consistently in your application
- **Refer** to your question and the activity in the same order

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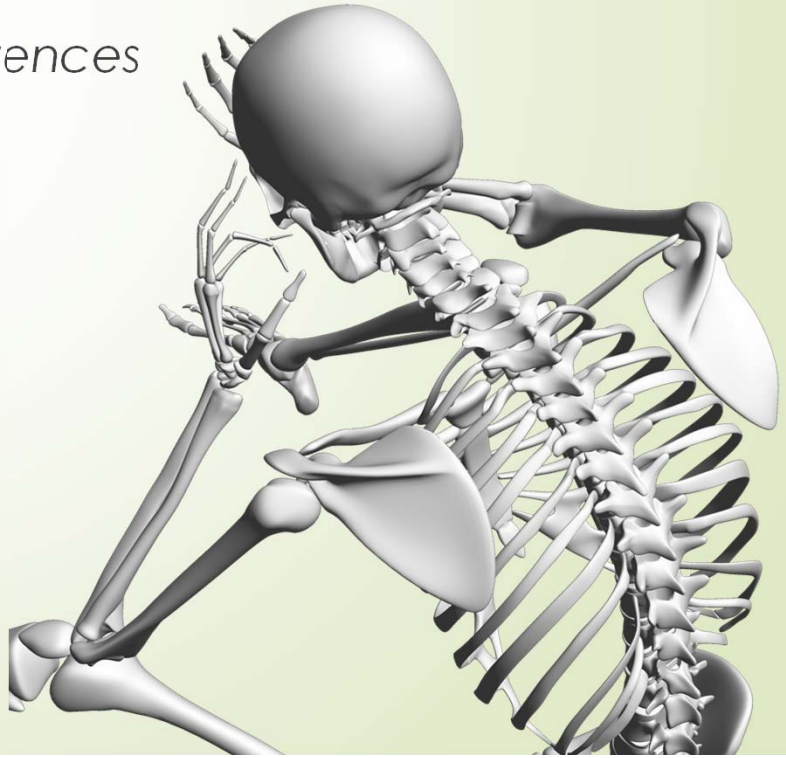
The Skeleton

- Structural outline
- Grant writing ≠ academic writing
- 10 key sentences
- **Activity**: *Write your key sentences*



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Structural outline

- Foot in the door
- We have a problem
- This project is the solution

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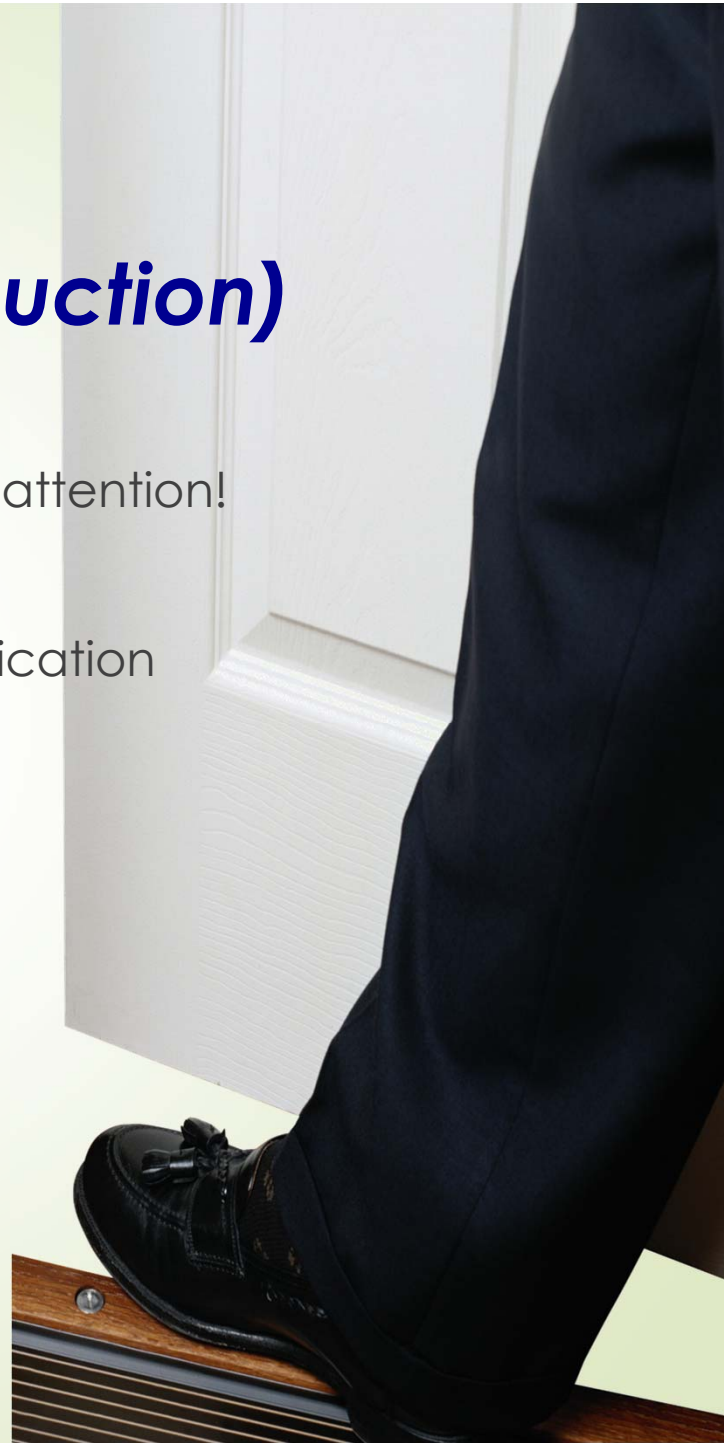
Structural outline

I: Foot in the door (Introduction)

- Excite your readers! Get their attention!
- Preview the whole project
- Maximum of < 20% of full application



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I: Foot in the door (Introduction)

1. Orient the reader to your project

Quickly:

- Establish **common ground** or a shared understanding by describing the context
- State your **research question and goal**
- Avoid a slow build-up and erudite quotations
- **REMEMBER: Reviewers are in a hurry**!

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I: Foot in the door (Introduction)

2. Establish the significance of your research

- **Disrupt the context** with a problem
- Explain the condition of **incomplete knowledge** and the **consequence** of this
- Clarify the **costs** if the problem is not solved

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I: Foot in the door (Introduction)

3. Preview the project

Briefly:

- **Describe** the project structure and components
- **Explain** how the sub-projects will collectively answer the research question
- Use both **'show and tell'** by providing short examples that reviewers can visualize
- State the **benefits** for the public or particular knowledge users

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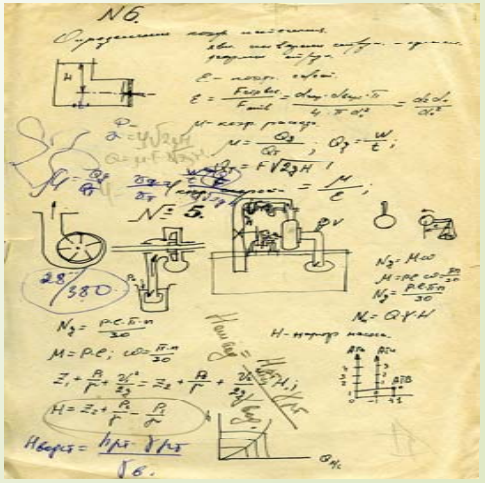
II: We have a problem: (Background)

1. The problem needs solving (importance)

- Keep literature review **focused on** and **relevant to your specific objectives**
- Present a short list of **realistic reasons — with evidence** — about **why** the problem needs solving
- Avoid hyperbole



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II: We have a problem: (Background)

2. You have the skills and expertise to solve the problem (competence)

- Cite your own work, but **be realistic** about its limits
- Cite others, to **show relevance** of your project
- Cite others, **to situate your work** in the larger field

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II: We have a problem: (Background)

3. This project is the best way to solve this problem (success & value)

- Detail your **sub-questions** and why we need the answers
- Match these questions to **specific research activities**
- Show that your **approach is reasonable** and appropriate.

Keep this background section to maximum ~30% of the proposal.

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III: This project is the solution (Description)

- **Introduce methodology**
- **Sub-projects** (in the same order as corresponding sub-questions):
  - What will be done, how, when, by whom, with what resources?
  - Which resources will the grant provide?
  - What will we learn?
  - How will you derive the findings?
- **Your plans** for this new knowledge
  - Dissemination?
  - Future research?

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III: This project is the solution (Description)

Writing the description allows you to

- determine if the project is do-able
- try out different design ideas and test ideas with colleagues
- determine if it is affordable — gives you a basis to start costing the project

The description is the main piece: ~50% of the proposal.

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Grant writing ≠ academic writing

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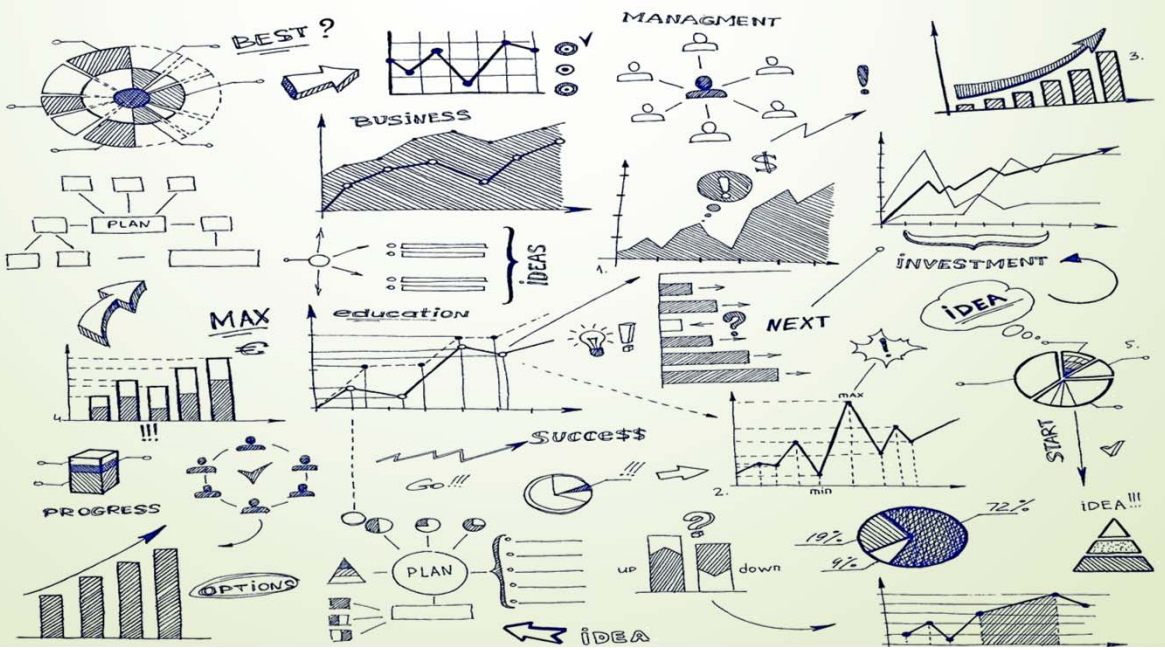
Grant writing differs in ***presentation***

- Shorter sentences
- Direct, concise style
- Less complicated level of language
- Tools for emphasis



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Grant writing differs in ***perspective***

- Aim to ***persuade***, not *explain new knowledge*
- Start with the ***importance of your idea***, not the *background*
- End with your ***expected outcomes***, not your *conclusions*
- Assume your reader is ***impatient and needs specific information immediately***,

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Activity

10 key sentences

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10 key sentences

- Your essential message in 10 headline statements
- Template sentences can be helpful

Template:

1. **This project will** [description of how it will make partial progress towards solve a huge, significant problem]
2. **by** [more specific description of what it will actually do]
3. [assertion that the project is novel or timely]
4. [claim to 'ownership' of the problem]

Example:

1. **This project will** develop a new potential treatment for stroke
2. **by** identifying, synthesizing and testing suitable molecules
3. from a family of novel synthetic metabolic inhibitors
4. that we have discovered.

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10 key sentences

Write in this order		Appears in this order
1, 2, 3	**Project goals – A statement for each sub-project and its objective:** **EG: *We need to know/ establish/ develop…..*** *(or compound form as bullets)*	**3, 4, 5+**
4	**Project overview – Summarizes main features of the project.** **EG: *This proposed project will*** *[general description of research project]* ***to*** *[specific description of research outcome]* ***so as to*** *[provisional statement indicating partial progress towards solution of a huge, significant problem]*	**6**
5, 6, 7	**Research objectives:** **EG: We will** [do the relevant activity] **to discover** [the thing you say in your corresponding GOAL statement]. **This will tell us**…..	**7, 8, 9+**
8	**Dissemination plan:** Draft an initial statement that you will revise later	**10**
9	**Opening statement:** Hardest to do, so write almost last	**1*** **
10	**Reason your outcomes are important –** Supports your opening statement in 2 clauses. **EG: The** [huge, important problem] **is** [phrase to demonstrate with evidence why problem matters for health, society, economy, advancement of knowledge/understanding]**;** [statement that the outcome(s) will contribute to solving the huge important problem]	**2*** ** **These last 2 statements should be written ONLY when all the rest is fleshed out**

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LUNCH!

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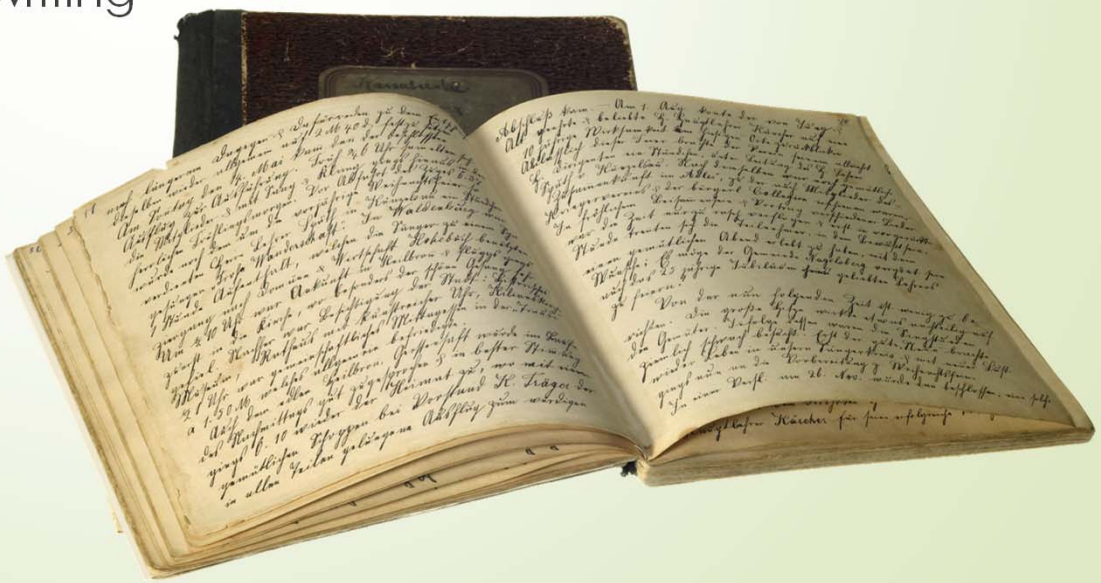
The Writing

- Write what you know
- Assert–justify style
- **Activity:** *Write a sub-project*
- Keep lists as you write
- The order of writing



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Write what you know

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Write what you know

- Start with the project description
- Break down the project description into sub-projects (one per objective)
- Write one sub-project description at a time

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Write what you know

http://www.parkerderrington.com/be-prepared/

Each sub-project needs: Why, What, How, Who

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Assert–justify style

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Assert–justify style

- Each paragraph covers **only one message**
- Each paragraph starts with an assertion (the ***message sentence***)
- The remainder of each paragraph **justifies that assertion**

HOW TO WRITE THIS WAY

- Find the message sentence in each paragraph
- Move it the beginning
- Edit the paragraph to make sense
  - **MEAL PLAN**
    - **M**ain — assertion
    - **E**vidence sentence(s)
    - **A**nalysis sentence(s)
    - **L**inking sentence

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Assert–justify style

Examples

- Staple theory addresses the relationship between state expansion and the physical aspects of landscape that can prohibit travel and dictate development [**Assert**]

  [**Justify** with description/explanation of the theory's constituents]

- Complex II mutations are mechanistically unique **[Assert].**

  [Justify with a description of how they are mechanistically unique]

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Assert–justify style

Advantages

- **Speed readers, tired readers, lazy readers** see your key messages
- **Detail readers** are pulled in
- Assertions are easy to **summarize**
- You lead with the most interesting part!

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Activity

Write a sub-project

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Write a sub-project

Each sub-project explains

- **activities** to be carried out — including when and for how long
- **expected outcomes** and impact (what you will discover)
- **resources** to be used (requested and already available)
- **which investigators** will conduct the work
- **methods** — in enough detail that someone else could carry out the research
- **data collection** and analysis strategies
- **knowledge dissemination** plan

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Write a sub-project

Checklist: Does the sub-project description

- **explain** the kind of research activity involved and what new knowledge it will bring us?
  - Does it do this in a single sentence?
  - Does the sentence come at the beginning?
- **list** specific research activities?
- **explain** who will undertake each activity?
- **note** a timeline for the activity (schedule or Gantt chart)?
- **explain** all methods directly?
  - or refer back to a methods section?
  - or refer to published literature?

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Write a sub-project

Checklist: Does the sub-project description

- **explain** what resources will be used?
  - including staff time and PI time?
- **explain** which resources will be provided by the institution and which by the grant?
- **explain** the processes that will lead from the research activity to the new knowledge?
- **demonstrate** how the new knowledge will be disseminated?

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Write a sub-project

The 4 propositions: Does the sub-project description demonstrate

- **competence** and likelihood of **success**, and that this the best way to gain the knowledge?
  - Does it include preliminary data?
  - Does it provide strategies to cope with potential pitfalls and problems?
- **value** in using the resources requested?
- **importance** of the research activity to the new knowledge desired?

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The order of writing

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The order of writing

1	*Sub-project 1*	*Sub-project 2*	*Sub-project 3*
2	***Full project description**:* add introduction and dissemination sections		
3	***Background sections**:* one per sub-project		
4	***Overall background**:* for overarching goal		
5	***Introduction**:* build from message sentences		

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The order of writing: ***Full project description***

Build on your sub-project descriptions by adding

- an introductory description of the overall project as it relates to your goal
- a description of general methods that are used in all sub-projects
- an explanation of how you will disseminate your results, to who, and why

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The order of writing: **Background**

- "We Have a Problem"
- Sub-sections that match each sub-project (in the same order)
  - Why we need your findings (list of discoveries)
  - Justify by citing ***relevant*** literature (problem needs to be solved)
  - Cite and carefully refute literature that contradicts your position
  - Cite your own work on the problem
- Introductory sub-section: overall research question and why it needs answers

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The order of writing: ***Introduction***

- "Foot in the Door"
- Build the introduction from your **message sentences** in Background and Project Description
  - Copy and paste each message sentence, in order
  - Edit for readability
- Use **key phrases** and **key words** from the funder's competition description

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High Impact Summary

- Based on your introduction
- Avoid adjectives or adverbs
- Don't claim that project is exciting or important
- Lead with the research question
- Choose accessible vocabulary
- Combine introductory sentences

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The Adapting

- Map your structural outline to competition requirements
- **Discussion**: How does your outline map to *your* competition requirements?
- 4 key readability factors — adapting to your audience

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Mapping the structural outlines to your application

Look for obvious overlaps and build out from there

Structural outline part	Application section SSHRC example	Application section NSERC example	Application section CIHR example
Foot in the door/ Intro [<20%]	Summary; Intro to objectives (DD)	Summary; Objectives (Discovery grant)	Quality of the idea (Project grant)
We have a problem [~30%]	Objectives, Context – lit review & theoretical approach (DD); Previous outputs	Recent Progress; Literature Review	Importance of the idea
This project is the solution [~50%]	Context & Methodology (DD); Knowledge mobilization; Budget; Expected outcomes	Methodology; Impact	Approach; Expertise, Experience & Resources

How does this model map to your competition requirements?

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4 Readability Factors:

Adapting to your audience

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Readability

Application should aim to be

- speed readable
- easy to understand quickly
- easy to remember
- easy to reconstruct and summarize

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Speed Readable

- **Strategy:** Assert–justify
- **Consistent structure**
  - Research questions or objectives in Background section match activities in Project Description
  - Summary structure matches application structure
- **Clear, consistent use of headings and terminology**

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Easy to understand quickly

- **Front-load the document:** Introduction concisely makes the whole case
- **Keep language simple**
  - Short sentences
  - Consistent terminology and phrasing
  - Minimal abbreviations and acronyms

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Easy to remember

- **Strategy: Prime** – trigger interest and concern by feeding contextual ideas beforehand
  - Like advance notice on highway signs
  - Builds enthusiasm and attention. **Make them worry!**
  - Prime all 4 propositions (importance, competence, value, success)
- **Strategy: Signpost** – informs reader about when they can skip ahead & when they need to pay attention
  - "In this section we describe….."
  - "We now set out the state of the art…."

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Easy to reconstruct

- **Strategy: Link & label to connect the pieces**
  - **Link** the pieces of your argument through consistent structure
  - **Make it easy** to see how the questions lead to the activities
  - **Reinforce** the themes running throughout
  - **Label** headings consistently and informatively
  - **Use 'tag phrases'** repeatedly for key technical terms or concepts

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The Review

Before Submitting

- Share with your community
- Get structured feedback on meeting the 4 propositions
- **Activity**: *Be the reviewer – assess a grant*

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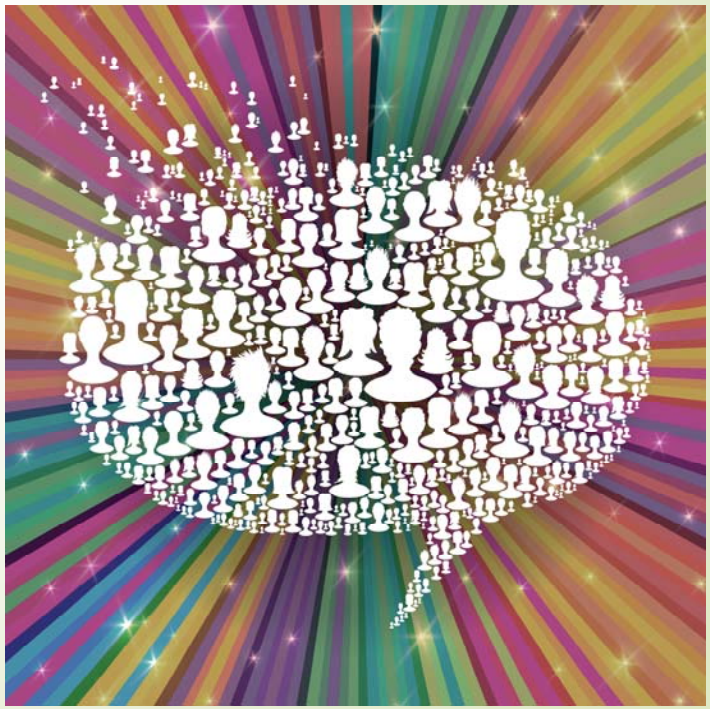
Share your draft widely with your community

- Past reviewers for your competition or panel
- People who have received funding from your competition or panel
- Research services staff
- Non-experts
- Colleagues and mentors



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Get structured feedback

Ask reviewers:

- How well does your proposal meet the 4 propositions?
- How well does your proposal meet the requirements of this specific competition?

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Activity

Be the Reviewer

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How easily can you answer these questions?

- What is the main research question?
- How much did you have to read to discover this question?
- Why is it important to answer this question?
- What are the different elements of the research project and how does each of them help answer the question?
- Can you identify the 10 key sentences?
- Where do the 3 components (introduction, background, description) appear?
- What will the researcher do with the knowledge produced?

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Resources

Research Funding Toolkit

UK-based website, blog and resources pages provide particularly useful information on aspects of grant writing

http://www.researchfundingtoolkit.org/

Parker–Derrington Ltd blog

http://www.parkerderrington.com/blog/

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Resources

What do we need to know?

- "Tool 12" in *The Research Funding Toolkit (2012)* by Jacqueline Aldridge and Andrew M. Derrington. Los Angeles, CA: Sage. pp 88–89.

10 key sentences

- http://www.researchfundingtoolkit.org/research-grant-cookbook

Write what you know

- http://www.researchfundingtoolkit.org/writing-a-research-grant-application-the-easy-way-how-to-start/

Assert–justify style

- http://www.researchfundingtoolkit.org/tell-them-then-convince-them/

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Resources

Order of writing

Full project description

- http://www.researchfundingtoolkit.org/describing-your-research-project/

Background

- http://www.researchfundingtoolkit.org/writing-the-background-section-of-the-case-for-support/

Introduction

- http://www.researchfundingtoolkit.org/writing-the-introduction-getting-your-foot-in-the-door/

Get structured feedback

- http://www.parkerderrington.com/ten-questions-to-get-feedback-on-a-grant-application/

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Further questions?

Resources to share?

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