Workshop on Grant Writing for Academic Success
Humanities and Visual & Performing Arts

August 23, 2006

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Office of Faculty Affairs and Development
University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine
Agenda

- How to think about writing
- How to be clear and well-organized
- How to use natural positions of emphasis
- How to engage the reader
- How to be convincing
- How to attend to the writing process
HOW TO THINK ABOUT WRITING
How to think about writing: writing is a process

- Writing is not only a means to share information and ideas, but is a way to develop and refine them.
- “Use writing as a tool for thinking”
  —Zinsser
- “I write to understand what I think”
  —Vergheze
How to think about writing: good writing is clear and convincing

- “…terms so clear and direct as to command their consent”—Jefferson

- The feature–benefit model
How to think about writing: good writing is reader-based

- Reader expectations
  - Familiar format
  - Clear, logical, understandable
  - Important, interesting
- The psychology of reviewers
WRITING IS A PROCESS
William Zinsser
“Use writing as a tool for thinking.”

“Take care of the process, and the product will take care of itself.”

“Freewriting” or brainstorming, then editing
- You can’t do both at the same time

Zinnser’s books on the writing process:
- *On Writing Well*
- *Writing to Learn*
At least 2 steps to the initial writing process

- A writers
- B writers
At least 2 steps to the initial writing process

A writers
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7

B writers
At least 2 steps to the initial writing process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A writers</th>
<th>B writers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– 1</td>
<td>– 2</td>
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<td>– 2</td>
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At least 2 steps to the initial writing process

- A writers
  - 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5
  - 6
  - 7

- B writers
  - 2
  - 5
  - 5
  - 1
  - 6
  - 2
  - 3
At least 2 steps to the initial writing process

- The intuitive stage
  - Freewriting, brainstorming, testing ideas

- The teaching stage
  - Explaining to the reader, linking ideas, organizing them logically
At least 3 steps to the whole writing process

- The intuitive stage
  - Freewriting, brainstorming, testing ideas
- The teaching stage
  - Explaining to the reader, linking ideas, organizing them logically
- The revision stage
  - Fine-tuning for clarity and emphasis
When do you get your best ideas?
When do you get your best ideas?

- Working out
- Driving
- Sleeping (or about to fall asleep)
- On vacation
- In the shower
- When you’re too busy to record them
- When you’re doing something else
Ways to record your best ideas when you have them

- A journal, a log of your ideas
- Index card and pen
- Pocket recorder
- Marker board on office wall
- Telephone message to yourself
- Personal digital assistant
- Your own system
- A measured approach
Freewriting exercise
Freewriting exercise
The writing process: "journaling"

- Write a page a day, every day, in a log of your ideas and observations.
- Read your log to get insight into issues that you cannot understand in real time
  - Weather map analogy
  - Story of the Wright Brothers
  - “The incubation of ideas”
The writing process: a timeline

- “Freewrite” or brainstorm
- Do research to familiarize yourself with the mission of the grantor
- Do literature search
- Put ideas onto notecards or other format
- Consult models of similar work
- Find the best organization to serve your purpose
- Gather samples, reviews, other evidence of previous work
- Write draft of proposal
- Solicit feedback on proposal
- Get feedback; revise
- Revise proposal manuscript
Attending to the writing process

- Regular time of day
- Regular place conducive to writing
- A positive
  - mental framework
  - physical environment
The incubation of ideas

- Abraham Verghese, MD: story of writing his first book
- Creating an environment for ideas to prosper
- Attending to the process
The incubation of ideas

Abraham Verghese, MD: story of writing his first book

Creating an environment for ideas to prosper

Attending to the process
Other writing ideas

- Use the spoken language to inform the written language
  - Use dictation or speech-recognition software
  - Give a series of talks about your work and plans

- Integrate your physical routine with your writing routine
  - Exercise and then write (“to get the blood flowing”)
  - Write and then exercise (as a reward)
Writing with co-authors

- Plan regularly scheduled meetings
- Decide *who* does *what* by *when*
- Develop a timeline with deadlines
  - Include time for
    - Feedback
    - Revision
GOOD WRITING IS CLEAR, CONVINCING, and

- Concise
- Transparent
- Available
- Easy to follow lines of reasoning

—Emory URC Chair Prof. David Pacini
BAD WRITING IS

- Niche
- Self-referential
- Jargon
- Unintelligible
The importance of structure to convey clarity and logic

The structure of

- Sentences
- Paragraphs
- Tables, charts, images
- Sections
- Proposal as a whole
How many interpretations should readers get from your writing?
How many interpretations should readers get from your writing?

1
“Misunderstanding in writing is 85% due to structural issues and only 15% due to contextual issues.”

“It is theoretically impossible to forward only a single interpretation. By using natural positions of emphasis, the best an author can do is make available to the reader the interpretation the author wants to convey.”
Structure of the sentence

A sentence has a subject and a verb.

Guideline: 1 idea per sentence
Active vs. passive voice

- **Active voice**
  - Subject—verb—object
    
    \textit{They wrote the book.}

- **Passive voice**
  - Object—verb—subject
    
    \textit{The book was written by them.}
A experimental theater company consisting of actors from 12 local high school drama clubs and community senior citizen centers was organized.

It is concluded that this program can help our clients in their transition to independent living.
A palliative, noncurative relief of symptoms was reported in women with rheumatoid arthritis taking the oral contraceptive Envoid by several investigators.
Passive to active

1. Find the **verb**
2. Find the true **subject**
3. Organize into subject–verb structure
4. Check that the revision conveys the information more clearly

5. A palliative, noncurative relief of symptoms was **reported** in women with rheumatoid arthritis taking the oral contraceptive Envoid by several **investigators**.
Several investigators reported a palliative, noncurative relief of symptoms in women with rheumatoid arthritis taking the oral contraceptive Envoid.
Exercise: position of emphasis in a sentence

1) Although the book offers practical advice, it is not well organized.
2) Although the book is not well organized, it does offer practical advice.
3) The book offers practical advice, but it is not well organized.
4) The book offers practical advice, and it is not well organized.
Position of emphasis in the sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st half</th>
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Position of emphasis is the 2\textsuperscript{nd} half of the sentence

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Example: position of emphasis in the sentence

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<tr>
<td>Development of a gallery for locally-produced folk art is the goal of this project.</td>
<td>The goal of this project is to develop a gallery for locally-produced folk art.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Only a select few historians studied topic X in the last decade.

Topic X has been studied by only a select few historians in the last decade.
Position of emphasis is the 2\textsuperscript{nd} half of the sentence

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Structure of a paragraph

- 1st sentence is the most important
  - Main idea or the context of the information
  - “Topic sentence”
Structure of a paragraph

- Middle sentences: the information
Structure of a paragraph

- Last sentence: a way to carry around the information
Structure of a paragraph

1st sentence is the most important
- Main idea or the context of the information
- “Topic sentence”

Middle sentences: the information

Last sentence: summary or evaluation of information
- eg, “Taken together, these data point to ….”
**Structure of a paragraph**

- **1st sentence** is the most important
  - Main idea or the context of the information
  - “Topic sentence”

- **Middle sentences**: the information

- **Last sentence**: significance or relevance of the information; why it is important
For each key **feature** (fact, data, point, experience) you address,

- Be sure to link a **benefit** (significance, relevance, value, advantage, importance) to it.
Examples of feature–benefit sentences

“‘My work to develop and manage the Community Theater Group gave me the experience necessary to recruit volunteers, organize rehearsals, and produce one-act plays. This experience will guide my future efforts to plan and direct the “spontaneous” street theater events planned (see page 19).

“I plan to take this approach because it will allow me to….”
Consistency in paragraph format

- Allows a reader to “intellectually skim” a document
- Teaches the reader *how to read* the document
  - to get the information efficiently
  - To understand the issue deeply
Tone

- Is a subtle but important issue
- Conveys your attitude
- Communicates a mental picture of you and your project
- Influences how readers
  - Receive the message
  - Understand the message
  - Respond to the message
Tone to convey in proposals

- Thoughtful
- Thorough
- Detail-oriented
- That you can see the big picture
- Both enthusiastic and realistic
- NOT to impress, but to convey meaning
Ways to engage your readers

- Use the first person ("I" or "we")
- Use questions
- Give examples
- Tell the story
- Show images
- Use a journalistic approach
Engage your readers by

- Varying the length of sentences
- “Chaining” sentences and ideas
- Transitioning between ideas and paragraphs
- Telling the story
- Using journalistic conventions
Journalistic conventions

- Questions
- Case examples
- Sidebars
- Callouts
- Graphics, images
- Color
- “Readability” of text
To make text readable

- Have a reasonable margin width
  - 1 inch is better than ½-inch
  - Consider using two columns per page
- Put line breaks between paragraphs
- Use left justification (as opposed to full justification)
- Use subheads and a numbering system
Effective writers

- Engage the reader
- Tell the story
- Model their writing after proven formats
- Display scholarship
Qualifications for Scholarship

- Think clearly and logically
- Express logical thought clearly and cogently
- Discriminate between the significant and the inconsequential
- Display technical prowess
- Handle abstract thought
- Analyze data objectively and accurately
- Interpret results confidently and conservatively
An effective grant proposal

- Follows the instructions and **addresses the mission of the grantor**
- Is a marketing document ("sell" the idea)
- Has both
  - A good idea
  - Clear, effective communication
- Is written for both
  - Expert reviewers
  - The "intelligent non-expert" (NIH) or "a learned scholar but not necessarily an expert in the field" (Emory)
Mission Statement

The University Research Committee (URC), a standing committee of the University Senate, is responsible for awarding small research grants to University faculty. Research is defined as scholarly pursuit according to the guidelines of your discipline. These funds are intended to help researchers achieve short-term research goals that can be accomplished in one year. These projects often provide preliminary data needed for extramural grant applications. Grants are peer reviewed and ranked for quality and impact. URC grants are not intended as a continuing source of funding.

Proposals are invited from all faculty throughout the University. Faculty holding temporary positions are not eligible. Projects designed to be completed by graduate students are not supported. Awards may be used for direct research support or release-time support for up to two courses. Release time is ordinarily defined as a {\textbf{release from teaching responsibilities only}}. Departmental commitments, committee responsibilities, and graduate student support continue during the period of the release time.

The URC is composed of faculty throughout the University and divided into five subcommittees; Biological & Health Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, Math & Natural Sciences, and Visual & Performing Arts. Proposals are reviewed by members of the appropriate subcommittee, as chosen by the applicant. Applications should be written for an understanding by a learned scholar but not necessarily an expert in that field. Avoid jargon and place a premium on clarity of presentation.
Research is defined as scholarly pursuit according to the guidelines of your discipline.

- Know the guidelines of your discipline for scholarly pursuit.
- Make a case for how your scholarly pursuit fits the guidelines of your discipline.
These funds are intended to help researchers achieve short-term research goals that can be accomplished in one year.

- Be sure that they are accomplishable within one year.
- Have specific, measurable indications of goal completion.
- Provide a timeline.
These projects often provide preliminary data needed for extramural grant applications.

- Stress that the project will produce the preliminary data you need to for extramural grant applications, and how it will do it.
- Match the preliminary data you plan to generate to the specific aims or goals that it will support in other applications.
Grants are peer reviewed and ranked for quality and impact.

- Get feedback from people who have been reviewers.

- **Quality**: Check that the presentation of ideas and the clarity of thought is high-quality; quality proposals will be ranked highly.

- **Impact**: Make a case for the impact of the project; stress how the project will advance understanding of an area or benefit a targeted population.
Applications should be written for an understanding by a learned scholar but not necessarily an expert in that field.

- Do not exclude readers; write to explain, not overwhelm.
- As scholars, reviewers like to understand the issue. If you make it hard for them to understand or follow, they will not feel like scholars and will start looking for items to criticize.
Avoid jargon and place a premium on clarity of presentation.

- Clarity will be rewarded.
- Obscurity will be punished.
Structure of a proposal

- Abstract or project description
- Introduction and goals
- Background and significance
- Preliminary data/evidence of previous success
- Work proposed
- Appendix
Logical development of plans

- Each section of the proposal justifies the next step
- Each aspect of the proposal can be traced to how it satisfies the main goal
Format of proposal: Humanities or Visual & Performing Arts

Broad, long-term objective

A. Goal 1
B. Goal 2
C. Goal 3

Background and Significance

C. Evidence of previous work

D. Work Proposed
Test of reasoning

The justification for each step can be traced back through each section of the proposal

– Use a numbering system for
  • Proposal goals
  • Section headings and subheadings
– Refer your reader to the need, goals, plan, and expected outcomes of the project
Format of proposal: Humanities or Visual & Performing Arts

A. Goal 1
B. Background and Significance
   B. Evidence of previous work
D. Work Proposed
“Applicants should complete, in outline form, what they propose to accomplish with this grant.”
One possible structure for the URC application (8 total pages)

Humanities and Visual & Performing Arts

- A. Introduction and goals: ½ page
- B. Background & significance: 1½ pages
- C. Preliminary work: 1½ pages
- D. Description of work proposed: 3½ pages
- E. Summary: ½ page
URC application format (suggested)

Broad, long-term objectives

Goal 1  Goal 2  Goal 3

Background and Significance

Work proposed

Summary
Proposal for a non-fiction book

- Table of contents of the proposal
- Concept statement
- Overview
- Audience
- Publicity/promotion
- Competition
- About the author
- Table of contents of the book
- Chapter outlines
Proposal for a non-fiction book: concept statement (1 page)

- Offers an agent or editor the first impression
- Must generate excitement
- Explains the subject of the book
- Identifies the book’s uniqueness and timeliness
- States the benefit the book offers to readers
- Includes a primary feature of the book
- Sketches the author’s credentials
- Identifies an audience
Proposal for a non-fiction book: overview (2–5 pages)

- Is a sales pitch
- Provides a thesis statement
- Describes the book’s contents
  - How you came to write the book
  - The importance or need for the book
- Includes rough word count of book
Proposal for a non-fiction book: audience (1 page)

- Be specific
- Target your audience
  - Who is your audience?
  - Who will buy your book? Why?
  - How will they use it or how will it help them?
  - What will it tell them that’s new or important?
Proposal for a non-fiction book: publicity/promotion (1 page)

- Sell your “outreach”
  - clinics
  - workshops
  - seminars
  - tv/radio lecture circuit

- Publishers
  - expect you to promote and sell your book
  - want authors with “national outreach”
Proposal for a non-fiction book: competition (1 page)

- Open with brief recap of your book’s uniqueness
- Research other books in area
  - Compare and contrast other books in area
  - Include title, author, publication info, dates
- Make a case for
  - The need for your book
  - how your book fits into market
Proposal for a non-fiction book: about the author (1 page)

- Describe yourself and your credentials
- Detail your experience with the topic
- Tell why you are best suited to write this book
- List other books or articles you’ve written
- Emphasize your chances to publicize book (seminars, workshops)
- Include CV
Proposal for a non-fiction book: table of contents

- Organize the table of contents so that it
  - is logical
  - “tells the story”
  - has
    - a beginning
    - a middle
    - an end
Proposal for a non-fiction book: chapter outlines

- 1 to 2 pages per chapter
- Should convey the organization and content of each chapter
- All together should convey the organization and content of the book
Proposal for a non-fiction book: sample chapter

- Serves a similar purpose as the preliminary studies in a scientific proposal
  - Gives reviewer the confidence that you can do the work
- Gives the literary agent an example so as to better sell the book to a publisher
Your writing is “authorized” if

- The proposal manuscript is well-organized
- All logic and reasoning are sound
- The author has
  - Accounted for the development of the ideas in each section of the proposal
  - Traced the background to justify the work
  - Shown how the work will advance the field of scholarship or art
Key concepts

- Form follows function
- Consistency of format
- Linking of lines of reasoning
- Use of positions of emphasis
- The feature-benefit model of selling
- Reinforcing and repeating of important info
- Graphic representation of key ideas
Facts about writing

- Writing is a skill
  - It can be improved with practice

- Writing is a process
  - It takes a number of different steps

- Writing is re-writing
  - “10% inspiration, 90% perspiration”
Clear proposal writing

- Is reader-based
- States objectives, goals and planned work *clearly* and *directly*
- Uses
  - Direct, simple sentences
  - Manageable, consistent paragraphs
  - Headings and subheadings, numbering system
Proposal-writing is a process

- Freewrite, then revise for your readers
- Keep a log, or journal, of your ideas
- Use a deliberate, measured approach—an hour a day, every day
- Organize and structure your writing to serve your purpose and the reader’s needs
- Stress the benefits of your points
- Solicit feedback
- Revise, revise, revise
Exercise: title

- Write the title of your project
- Revise title to include the
  - Importance
  - Significance
  - Relevance
  - Value
  - Benefit

of the project
Exercise: first sentence of project description

Instructions: “State the application’s broad, long-term goal....

Write the first half of the first sentence of your project description:

___________________________________
___________________________________
Format of a proposal
Humanities and Visual & Performing Arts

- A. Introduction and goals: ½ page
- B. Background & significance: 1½ pages
- C. Preliminary work: 1½ pages
- D. Description of work proposed: 3½ pages
- E. Summary: ½ page
Introduction and goals

- ½ to 1 page
- Is the second test of whether the reviewer is going to continue to read
The goals of the project

- Will appear in the
  - Introduction and goals
  - Summary

- May be referenced in
  - Background and significance
  - Preliminary work
  - Work proposed, which may be organized around the goals
The goals themselves

- Each should be numbered
- Each should be specific
- Each should have a clear aim
  - Each aim should have a clear outcome
Goals section: format

1\textsuperscript{st} paragraph
- Broad, long-term objective
- Background
- Relevance scholarship or mission of grantor

2\textsuperscript{nd} paragraph
- “To achieve our objective, we have designed the following goals.”
- Numbered list of goals
Goals section: format

- Last paragraph
  - Expected outcomes, organized around each aim, if possible
  - Relevance to scholarship or mission of grantor
  - Other benefit statements
Background and Significance

- Sets the stage upon which your work is displayed to full advantage
- Identifies
  - gaps your project will fill
  - Unanswered questions or needs your project will answer or satisfy
- Ideas and results (your and others’) are
  - Discussed
  - Compared
  - Brought together

- Janet Rasey, *Writing, Speaking, & Communication Skills for Health Professionals*
4 Cs of the Background

- Compare
- Contrast
- Cite the literature judiciously
- Critique what you have read respectfully

the work done by others; evaluate it
Significance

- To field or art or scholarship
- To advances in the field
- To what the knowledge gained will allow in the future
Background and Significance: format

- **Background:** 1 page
  - Break into 3 or 4 paragraphs
  - Use subheads to orient reader
  - Structure it so it leads to your experimental plan

- **Significance:** 1 page
  - Break into 3 or 4 paragraphs
  - Use subheads to orient reader
  - Make a case for how your work will
    - Fill in gaps in the body of knowledge
    - Add to the field
Exercise: Write 12 sentences (12 min)

- Sentences 1–4 should start
  - “My project is **significant** because….”
- Sentences 5–8 should start
  - “My project is **original** because….”
- Sentences 9–12 should start
  - “I and my staff are **uniquely qualified** to do this work because….”
Preliminary Work

- Shows that
  - you have the ability to do the proposed work
  - your work plan is supported by your previous work

- Warnings
  - Sloppy preliminary work suggests sloppy proposed work
  - Unclearly presented work suggests unclear thinking
Preliminary Work

Include

- data pertinent to/in support of proposed work
- evidence that you know how to complete the proposed work
- headings and a numbering system
- graphs, pictures, and descriptive figure legends
- summary sections that emphasize significance or what you learned from each preliminary project
Preliminary work: format

- If appropriate, organize around current goals
- Otherwise, have a logical format
  - Broad to specific
  - Chronological
  - Most important to least important
  - Most relevant to least relevant
Proposed work

Purpose: to convince reviewers that you
- have a clear overview of the project
- can see the connections between different parts of the research and the proposal
- have a framework for the details that follow
Biographical sketch

- Tell it like a story
- Highlight accomplishments in area
- Emphasize relation to project
- Use examples
- Make it interesting
Exercise: biographical sketch

- Interview the person next to you (5 min)
  - Find out about their ideal project
  - Solicit stories and examples
- Switch places and be interviewed (5 min)
- Write short profile article (10 min)
  - Use WHO—WHAT—HOW format
  - Use questions, stories and examples to engage the reader
- Give it to person profiled
Proposal resubmission

Opportunity to

- Improve proposal and the project
- Show that you addressed all the concerns of reviewers
- Capitalize on the strengths of the application
Response to reviewers

Purpose is to
- Show how you revised the proposal in response to the critiques
- Justify the revisions
- Direct reviewers to the revisions in the proposal

ALSO
- Show that you can be flexible
- Show that you value the critiques and suggestions
Response to reviewers: format

- First paragraph
  - Thank reviewers for their critiques
  - Mention that their suggestions have allowed you to strengthen the proposal (in the following ways…)

- Following paragraphs
  - List critique or summarize reviewer suggestion
  - Detail how you revised the application to reflect the reviewer’s comment; list section or page number in which the revision appears
Response to reviewers: tone

- Genuinely thankful for the guidance to improve the proposal
- Enthusiastic about the added strength of the proposal
- Detail-oriented
- Able to see the big picture and added benefits of revised proposal
Effective use of graphs and legends

- Is especially useful
  - For data
  - To help explain complex ideas
  - To repeat important ideas, concepts, strategies

How to think about graphics
- Consider that the reviewers only have time to look at your figures, charts and images—will they get a good sense of the proposal?
When assessing the scientific and technical merit of an application, all NIH review committees use the same criteria:

1. Significance
2. Approach
3. Innovation
4. Investigators
5. Environment

Though peer reviewers don't score applications strictly by review criteria, the criteria are gauges for assessing scientific and technical merit and feasibility. In writing your application, think of your goal as a quest to convince peer reviewers your proposal is important, your approach is logical and innovative, you have the resources to do the job, and you and your collaborators are qualified to accomplish the research.

Also keep in mind that, to a large extent, reviewers judge your application against their ideal outstanding application in your field of science. This is analogous to a dog show, where breeds are judged against their own standard for their breed, but different breeds do not compete with each other.
Timelines

- Show that you have a clear plan
- Show that you have thought through the project
- Show that you can manage the project
- Can include time to
  - Train staff
  - Collect and analyze data
  - Write reports and present papers (disseminate the information)
Exercise: Mind-mapping
(10 min)

- Draw a graphical representation of your project. Include shapes to represent
  - Need for the project
  - Objective and goals
  - Preliminary work
  - Probable outcomes
  - Benefits to different populations
  - Benefits to the area of scholarship
Follow-up exercise: Mind-mapping

- 2 min: describe the mind map of your project to neighbor
- 2 min: listen to neighbor’s 2-min explanation
- 10 min: Write up neighbor’s project description based on mind map
Selected references

Blake, R and Bly, R. *The Elements of Business Writing*


Ogden, T. *Research Proposals: A Guide to Success*

Rasey, J. *Writing, Speaking, & Communication Skills for Health Professionals*

Reif-Lehrer, L. *Grant Application Writer’s Handbook*

Ziegler, M. *Essentials of Writing Biomedical Research Papers*