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Proposals

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Proposals attempt to *persuade* an audience to take some form of action: to authorize a project, accept a service or product, or otherwise support a specific plan for solving a problem or improving a situation.

Your own proposal might consist of a letter to your school board to suggest changes in the English curriculum; it may be a memo to your firm's vice president to request funding for a training program for new employees; or it may be an extensive document to the Defense Department to bid on a guided-missile contract (competing with proposals from other firms). As a student or as an intern at a nonprofit agency, you might submit a *grant proposal*, requesting financial support for a research or community project.

You might work alone or collaboratively, as part of a team. Developing and writing the proposal might take hours or months. If your job depends on funding from outside sources, proposals might be the most important documents you produce.

HOW PROPOSALS AND REPORTS DIFFER IN PURPOSE

While they may contain many of the same basic elements as a report, proposals have a primarily *persuasive* purpose: to move people to say "Yes. Let's move ahead on this." Of course, reports can also contain persuasive elements, as in recommending a specific course of action or justifying an equipment purchase. But reports typically serve a variety of *informative* purposes as well—such as keeping track of progress, explaining why something happened, or predicting an outcome.

A report often precedes a proposal: for example, a report on high levels of chemical pollution in a major waterway typically leads to various proposals for cleaning up that waterway. In short, once the report has *explored* a particular need, a proposal will be developed to *sell* the idea for meeting that need.

THE PROPOSAL AUDIENCE

In science, business, government, or education, proposals are written for decision makers: managers, executives, directors, clients, board members, or community leaders. Inside or outside your organization, these people review various proposals and then decide whether a specific plan is worthwhile, whether the project will materialize, or whether the service or product is useful.

Before accepting a particular proposal, reviewers look for persuasive answers to these basic questions:

- *What exactly is the problem or need, and why is this such a big deal?*
- *Why should we spend time, money, and effort on this?*
- *What exactly is your plan, and how do we know this will work?*
- *Why should we accept the following things that seem wrong or costly about your plan?*
- *What action are we supposed to take?*

Connect with your audience by addressing these questions early and systematically (as previewed on page 46 and restated here):

1. *Spell out the problem (and its causes) clearly and convincingly.* Give enough detail for your audience to appreciate the problem's importance.
2. *Point out the benefits of solving the problem.* Explain specifically to your readers what they stand to gain.
3. *Offer a realistic, cost-effective solution.* Stick to claims or assertions you can support.
4. *Address anticipated objections to your solution.* Consider carefully your audience's level of skepticism about this issue.
5. *Induce your audience to act.* Decide exactly what you want your readers to do and give reasons why they should be the ones to take action.

Pages 578–84 offer examples and strategies for completing each of these tasks.

THE PROPOSAL PROCESS

The basic proposal process can be summarized like this: someone offers a plan for something that needs to be done. In business and government, this process has three stages:

1. Client *X* needs a service or product.
2. Firms *A*, *B*, and *C* propose a plan for meeting the need.
3. Client *X* awards the job to the firm offering the best proposal.

The complexity of each phase will, of course, depend on the situation. Here is a typical scenario:

Submitting a Competitive Proposal

You manage a mining engineering firm in Tulsa, Oklahoma. You regularly read the *Commerce Business Daily*, an essential online reference tool for anyone whose firm seeks government contracts. This publication lists the government's latest needs for services (salvage, engineering, maintenance) and for *supplies, equipment, and materials* (guided missiles, engine parts, and so on). On Wednesday, February 19, you spot this announcement:

Development of Alternative Solutions to Acid Mine Water Contamination from

Abandoned Lead and Zinc Mines near Tar Creek, Neosho River, Ground Lake, and the Boone and Roubidoux aquifers in northeastern Oklahoma. This will include assessment of environmental effects of mine drainage followed by development and evaluation of alternate solutions to alleviate acid mine drainage in receiving streams. An optional portion of the contract to be bid on as an add-on and awarded at the discretion of the OWRB will be to prepare an Environmental Impact Assessment for each of three alternative solutions as selected by the OWRB. The project is expected to take six months to accomplish, with an anticipated completion date of September 30, 20XX. The projected effort for the required task is thirty person-months. The requests for proposal is available at www.owrb.org. Proposals are due March 1.

Oklahoma Water Resources Board
P.O. Box 53585
1000 Northeast 10th Street
Oklahoma City, OK 73151
(405)555-2541

Your firm has the personnel, experience, and time to do the job, so you decide to compete for the contract. Because the March 1 deadline is fast approaching, you immediately download the request for proposal (RFP). The RFP will give you the guidelines for developing and submitting the proposal—guidelines for spelling out your plan to solve the problem (methods, timetables, costs).

You then get right to work with the two staff engineers you have appointed to your proposal team. Because the credentials of your staff could affect the client's acceptance of the proposal, you ask team members to update their résumés for inclusion in an appendix to the proposal. _

In scenarios like this, the client will award the contract to the firm submitting the best proposal, based on the following criteria (and perhaps others):

- understanding of the client's needs, as described in the RFP
- clarity and soundness of the plan being offered
- quality of the project's organization and management
- ability to complete the job by deadline
- ability to control costs
- firm's experience on similar projects
- qualifications of staff to be assigned to the project
- firm's record for similar projects

A client's specific evaluation criteria are often listed (in order of importance or on a point scale) in the RFP. Although these criteria may vary, every client expects a proposal that is *clear*, *informative*, and *realistic*.

In contrast to proposals prepared for commercial purposes, museums, community service groups, and other nonprofit organizations prepare *grant proposals* that request financial support for worthwhile causes. Government and charitable granting agencies such as the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Agriculture, or the Pugh Charitable Trust solicit proposals for funding in areas such as medical research, educational TV programming, and rural development. Submission and review of grant proposals follow the same basic process used for commercial proposals. Figure 23.1 shows part of a request for funding proposals. This RFP was issued by a U.S. government health organization.

In both the commercial and nonprofit sector, the proposal process increasingly occurs online. The National Science Foundation's *Fastlane* Web site <www.fastlane.nsf.gov>, for example, allows grant applicants to submit proposals in electronic format. This enables applicants to include sophisticated graphics, to revise budget estimates, to update other aspects of the plan as needed, and to maintain real-time contact with the granting agency while the proposal is being reviewed.

PROPOSAL TYPES

Proposals are classified according to *origin*, *audience*, and *purpose*. Based on its origin, a proposal is either *solicited* or *unsolicited*. Solicited proposals are those requested by a potential client or your employer, as in the engineering firm example on page 569. Unsolicited proposals are not specifically requested. For example, if you are creating a new Web site development service in your town, you might send out short proposals to area businesses, to suggest methods for online advertising and sales.

Based on its audience, a proposal may be *internal* or *external*—written for members of your organization or for clients and funding agencies. (The situation on page 569 calls for an external proposal.)

Based on its purpose, a proposal may be a *planning*, *research*, or *sales* proposal. Some proposals fall within all three categories.

Planning Proposal

A planning proposal offers solutions to a problem or suggestions for improvement. It might be a request for funding to expand the campus newspaper, an architectural plan for new facilities at a ski area, or a plan to develop energy alternatives to fossil fuels.

The short planning proposal that follows is external and solicited. The XYZ Corporation is about to contract a team of communication consultants to design in-house writing workshops, and the consultants must persuade the client (the company's education officer) that their methods will succeed. After briefly introducing the problem, the authors develop their proposal under two headings and several subheadings, making the document easy to read and to the point. Because this proposal is external, it takes the form of a letter.

PLANNING PROPOSAL

Dear Mary:

Thanks for sending the writing samples from your technical support staff. Here is what we're doing to design a realistic approach.

Needs Assessment

After conferring with technicians in both Jack's and Terry's groups and analyzing their writing samples, we identified this hierarchy of needs:

- improving readability
- achieving precise diction
- summarizing information
- organizing a set of procedures
- formulating various memo reports
- analyzing audiences for upward communication
- writing persuasive bids for transfer or promotion
- writing persuasive suggestions

Proposed Plan

Based on the needs listed above, we have limited our instruction package to eight carefully selected and readily achievable goals.

Course Outline. Our eight, two-hour sessions are structured as follows:

1. achieving sentence clarity
2. achieving sentence conciseness
3. achieving fluency and precise diction
4. writing summaries and abstracts
5. outlining manuals and procedures
6. editing manuals and procedures
7. designing various reports for various purposes
8. analyzing the audience and writing persuasively

Classroom Format. The first three meetings will be lecture-intensive with weekly exercises to be done at home and edited collectively in class. The remaining five weeks will combine lecture and exercises with group editing of work-related documents. We plan to remain flexible so we can respond to needs that arise.

Limitations

Given our limited contact time, we cannot realistically expect to turn out a batch of polished communicators. By the end of the course, however, our students will have begun to appreciate writing as a deliberate process.

If you have any suggestions for refining this plan, please let us know.

Notice that the word choice (“thanks,” “what we’re doing,” “Jack and Terry”) creates an informal, familiar tone—appropriate in this external document only because the consultants and client have spent many hours in conferences, luncheons, and phone conversations. Notice also that the “Limitations” section indicates that these authors are careful to promise no more than they can deliver.

Research Proposal

Research (or grant) proposals request approval (and often funding) for some type of study. A university chemist might address a research proposal to the Environmental Protection Agency for funds to identify toxic contaminants in local groundwater. Research proposals are solicited by many government and private agencies: National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, and others. Each granting agency has its own requirements and guidelines for proposal format and content. Successful research proposals follow those guidelines and carefully articulate the goals of the project.

Other research proposals might be submitted by students requesting funds or approval for independent study, field study, or a thesis project. A technical writing student usually submits a relatively brief research proposal that will lead to the term project (such as the long proposal that begins on page 585 or the analytical report that begins on page 617).

In the following research proposal, Tom Dewoody requests his instructor’s authorization to do a feasibility study (Chapter 24) that will produce an analytical report for potential investors. Dewoody’s proposal clearly answers the questions about *what*, *why*, *how*, *when*, and *where*. Because this proposal is internal, it is cast informally as a memo.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

To: Dr. John Lannon
From: T. Sorrells Dewoody
Date: March 16, 20XX
Subject: *Proposal for Determining the Feasibility of Marketing Dead Western White Pine*

Introduction

Over the past four decades, huge losses of western white pine have occurred in the northern Rockies, primarily attributable to white pine blister rust and the attack of the mountain pine beetle. Estimated annual mortality is 318 million board feet. Because of the low natural resistance of white pine to blister rust, this high mortality rate is expected to continue indefinitely.

If white pine is not harvested while the tree is dying or soon after death, the wood begins to dry and check (warp and crack). The sapwood is discolored by blue stain, a fungus carried by the mountain pine beetle. If the white pine continues to stand after death, heart cracks develop. These factors work together to cause degradation of the lumber and consequent loss in value.

Statement of Problem

White pine mortality reduces the value of white pine stumpage because the commercial lumber market will not accept dead wood. The major implications of this problem are two: first, in the face of rising demand for wood, vast amounts of timber lie unused; second, dead trees are left to accumulate in the woods, where they are rapidly becoming a major fire hazard here in northern Idaho and elsewhere.

Proposed Solution

One possible solution to the problem of white pine mortality and waste is to search for markets other than the conventional lumber market. The last few years have seen a burst of popularity and growing demand for weathered barn boards and wormy pine for interior paneling. Some firms around the country are marketing defective wood as specialty products. (These firms call the wood from which their products come "distressed," a term I will use hereafter to refer to dead and defective white pine.) Distressed white pine quite possibly will find a place in such a market.

Scope

To assess the feasibility of developing a market for distressed white pine, I plan to pursue six areas of inquiry.

1. What products presently are being produced from dead wood, and what are the approximate costs of production?
2. How large is the demand for distressed-wood products?
3. Can distressed white pine meet this demand as well as other species meet it?
4. Does the market contain room for distressed white pine?
5. What are the costs of retrieving and milling distressed white pine?
6. What prices for the products can the market bear?

Methods

My primary data sources will include consultations with Dr. James Hill, Professor of Wood Utilization, and Dr. Sven Bergman, Forest

Economist—both members of the College of Forestry, Wildlife, and Range. I will also inspect decks of dead white pine at several locations and visit a processing mill to evaluate it as a possible base of operations. I will round out my primary research with a letter and telephone survey of processors and wholesalers of distressed material.

Secondary sources will include publications on the uses of dead timber, and a review of a study by Dr. Hill on the uses of dead white pine.

My Qualifications

I have been following Dr. Hill's study on dead white pine for two years. In June of this year I will receive my B.S. in forest management. I am familiar with wood milling processes and have firsthand experience at logging. My association with Drs. Hill and Bergman gives me the opportunity for an in-depth feasibility study.

Conclusion

Clearly, action is needed to reduce the vast accumulations of dead white pine in our forests. The land on which they stand is among the most productive forests in northern Idaho. By addressing the six areas of inquiry mentioned earlier, I can determine the feasibility of directing capital and labor to the production of distressed white pine products. With your approval I will begin research at once.

Sales Proposal

The sales proposal is a marketing tool that offers a service or product. The offer may be solicited or unsolicited. If the proposal is solicited, several firms may be competing for the contract, so your proposal may be ranked against others by a committee. Because sales proposals are addressed to readers outside your organization, they are cast as letters if they are brief (as on page 411). Long sales proposals, like long reports, are formal documents with supplements (cover letter, title page, table of contents).

A successful sales proposal persuades customers that your product or service surpasses those offered by competitors. In the following solicited proposal, the writer explains why his machinery is best for the job, how the job can be done efficiently, what qualifications his company can offer, and what costs are involved. To protect himself, he points out possible causes of increased costs.

SALES PROPOSAL

Subject: *Proposal to Dig a Trench and Move Boulders at Bliss Site*

Dear Mr. Haver:

I've inspected your property and would be happy to undertake the landscaping project necessary for the development of your farm.

The backhoe I use cuts a span 3 feet wide and can dig as deep as 18 feet—more than an adequate depth for the mainline pipe you wish to lay. Because this backhoe is on tracks rather than tires, and is hydraulically operated, it is particularly efficient in moving rocks. I have more than twelve years of experience with backhoe work and have completed many jobs similar to this one.

After examining the huge boulders that block access to your property, I am convinced they can be moved only if I dig out underneath and exert upward pressure with the hydraulic ram while you push forward on the boulders with your D-9 Caterpillar. With this method, we can move enough rock to enable you to farm that now inaccessible tract. Because of its power, my larger backhoe will save you both time and money in the long run.

This job should take 12 to 15 hours, unless we encounter subsurface ledge formations. My fee is \$200 per hour. The fact that I provide my own dynamiting crew at no extra charge should be an advantage to you because you have so much rock to be moved.

Please phone me anytime for more information. I'm sure we can do the job economically and efficiently.

NOTE *Never underestimate costs by failing to account for all variables—a sure way to lose money or clients.*

What you include in a sales proposal will depend on the guidelines from the client or on your thorough analysis of the kinds of information your audience needs.

NOTE *The proposal categories (planning, research, and sales) discussed in this section are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive. A research proposal, for example, may request funds for a study that will lead to a planning proposal. The Vista proposal partially shown below combines planning and sales features; if clients accept the preliminary plan, they will hire the firm to install the automated system.*

ELEMENTS OF A PERSUASIVE PROPOSAL

Reviewers will evaluate your proposal on the basis of the following quality indicators. (See also the criteria listed on page 570.)

A Forecasting Title

Overworked reviewers facing a stack of proposals may well decide to focus on those “with the most intriguing titles” (Friedland and Folt 53). In any case, your title should announce the proposal’s purpose and content. Don’t be vague.

Proposed Office Procedures for Vista Freight, Inc.

A Proposal for Automating Vista's Freight Billing System

Don't write "Recommended Improvements" when you mean "Recommended Wastewater Treatment."

Clear Understanding of the Audience's Needs

The proposal audience wants specific suggestions for meeting their specific needs. Their biggest question is "What will this plan do for me?" Show that you clearly understand your clients' problems and their expectations, and then offer an appropriate solution.

In the following proposal for automating office procedures at Vista, Inc., Gerald Beaulieu begins with a clear assessment of needs and then moves quickly into a proposed plan of action.

Statement of the Problem

Vista provides two services. (1) It locates freight carriers for its clients. The carriers, in turn, pay Vista a 6 percent commission for each referral. (2) Vista handles all shipping paperwork for its clients. For this auditing service, clients pay Vista a monthly retainer.

Although Vista's business has increased steadily for the past three years, record keeping, accounting, and other paperwork are still done manually. These inefficient procedures have caused a number of problems, including late billings, lost commissions, and poor account maintenance. Updated office procedures seem crucial to competitiveness and continued growth.

Objective

This proposal offers a realistic and effective plan for streamlining Vista's office procedures. We first identify the burden imposed on your staff by the current system, and then we show how to reduce inefficiency, eliminate client complaints, and improve your cash flow by automating most office procedures.

A Clear Focus on Benefits

Do a detailed audience analysis to identify readers' major concerns and to anticipate likely questions and objections. Show your audience that you understand what they (or their organization) will gain by adopting your plan. The following bulleted list spells out exactly what tasks Vista employees will be able to accomplish once the proposed plan is implemented.

Once your automated system is operational, you will be able to

- identify cost-effective carriers

- coordinate shipments (which will ensure substantial client discounts)
- print commission bills
- track shipments by weight, miles, fuel costs, and destination
- send clients weekly audit reports on their shipments
- bill clients on a 25-day cycle
- produce weekly or monthly reports

Additional benefits include eliminating repetitive tasks, improving cash flow, and increasing productivity.

(Each of these benefits will be described at length later in the “Plan” section.)

Honest and Supportable Claims

Because they typically involve large sums of money as well as contractual obligations, proposals require a solid ethical and legal foundation. Clients in these situations often have doubts or objections about time and financial costs and a host of other risks involved whenever any important project is undertaken. Your proposal needs to address these issues openly and honestly. For example, if you are proposing to install customized virus-protection software, be clear about what this software cannot accomplish under certain circumstances. False or exaggerated promises not only damage a writer’s or a company’s reputation, but also invite lawsuits. (For more on supporting your claims, see page 56.)

Here is how the Vista proposal qualifies its promises:

As countless firms have learned, imposing automated procedures on employees can create severe morale problems—particularly among senior staff who feel coerced and often marginalized. To diminish employee resistance, we suggest that your entire staff be invited to comment on this proposal. To help avoid hardware and software problems once the system is operational, we have included recommendations and a budget for staff training. (Adequate training is essential to the automation process.)

If the best available solutions have limitations, say so. Notice how the above solutions are qualified (“diminish” and “help avoid” instead of “eliminate”) so as not to promise more than the plan can achieve.

A proposal can be judged fraudulent if it misleads potential clients by

- making unsupported claims,
- ignoring anticipated technical problems, or
- knowingly underestimating costs or time requirements.

For a project involving complex tasks or phases, provide a realistic timetable (perhaps using a Gantt chart, page 312) to show when each major phase will begin and end. Also provide a realistic, accurate budget, with a detailed cost breakdown (for supplies and equipment, travel, research costs, outside contractors, or the like) to show clients exactly how the money is being spent.

NOTE *Be absolutely certain that you spend every dollar according to the allocations that have been stipulated. For example, if a grant award allocates a certain amount for “a research assistant,” be sure to spend that exact amount for that exact purpose—unless you receive written permission from the granting agency to shift funds for other purposes. Keep strict accounting of all the money you spend. Proposal experts Friedland and Folt remind us that “Financial misconduct is never tolerated, regardless of intent” (161). Even an innocent mistake or accounting lapse on your part can lead to charges of fraud.*

Appropriate Detail

Vagueness in a proposal is fatal. Spell everything out. Instead of writing, “We will install state-of-the-art equipment,” enumerate the products or services to be provided.

To meet your automation requirements, we will install twelve Power Macintosh G4 computers with 60-Gigabyte hard drives. The system will be networked for rapid file transfer between offices. The plan also includes interconnection with four Hewlett-Packard 5 MP printers, and one HP Desk Jet 1600 CM color printer.

To avoid misunderstandings that could produce legal complications, a proposal must elicit *one* interpretation only.

Place support material (maps, blueprints, specifications, calculations) in an appendix so as not to interrupt the discussion.

NOTE *While concrete and specific detail is vital, never overburden reviewers with needless material. A precise audience analysis (Chapter 3) can pinpoint specific information needs.*

Readability

A readable proposal is straightforward, easy to follow, and understandable. Avoid language that is overblown or too technical for your audience. Review Chapter 13 for style strategies.

Convincing Language

Your proposal should move people to action. Review Chapter 4 for persuasion guidelines. Keep your tone confident and encouraging, not bossy and critical. For more on tone, see pages 274–82.

Visuals

Emphasize key points in your proposal with relevant tables, flowcharts, and other visuals (Chapter 14), properly introduced and discussed.

As the flowchart (Figure 1) illustrates, Vista's routing and billing system creates redundant work for your staff. The routing sheet alone is handled at least six times. Such extensive handling leads to errors, misplaced paperwork, and late billing.

Accessible Page Design

Yours might be one of several proposals being reviewed. Help the audience to get in quickly, find what they need, and get out. Review Chapter 15 for design strategies.

Supplements Tailored for a Diverse Audience

A single proposal often addresses a diverse audience: executives, managers, technical experts, attorneys, politicians, and so on. Various reviewers are interested in various parts of your proposal. Experts look for the technical details. Others might be interested in the recommendations, costs, timetable, or expected results, but they will need an explanation of technical details as well.

If the primary audience is expert or informed, keep the proposal text itself technical. For uninformed secondary reviewers (if any), provide an informative abstract, a glossary, and appendixes explaining specialized information. If the primary audience has no expertise and the secondary audience does, write the proposal itself for laypersons, and provide appendixes with the technical details (formulas, specifications, calculations) that experts will use to evaluate your plan. See Chapter 25 for specific supplements.

If you are unsure which supplements to include in an internal proposal, ask the intended audience or study other proposals. For a solicited proposal (to an outside agency), follow the agency's instructions exactly.

Proper Citation of Sources and Contributors

Proposals rarely emerge from thin air. Whenever appropriate, especially for topics that involve ongoing research, you need to credit key information sources and contributors. Proposal experts Friedland and Folt offer these suggestions:

- *Review the literature on this topic.* Limit your focus to “the few most important or influential” background studies (135).
- *Don’t cite sources of “common knowledge” about this topic (136).* Information available in multiple sources or readily known in your discipline usually qualifies as common knowledge. For more, see page 685.
- *Provide adequate support for your plan.* “In general, cite all papers that are essential to establish credibility and feasibility” (135).
- *Provide up-to-date principal references.* Although references to earlier, groundbreaking studies are important, recent studies can be most essential (134).
- *Present a balanced, unbiased view.* Acknowledge sources that differ from or oppose your point of view; explain the key differences among the various viewpoints before making your case (134).
- *Give credit to all contributors.* Recognize everyone who has worked on or helped with this proposal: for example, coauthors, editors, data gatherers, and people who contributed various ideas (22).

Proper citation is not only an ethical requirement, but also an indicator of your proposal’s credibility. See Appendix A for more on citation techniques.

AN OUTLINE AND MODEL FOR PROPOSALS

Depending on a proposal’s complexity, each section contains some or all of the subsections listed in the following general outline:

- I. Introduction
 - A. Statement of Problem and Objective/Project Overview
 - B. Background and Review of the Literature (as needed)
 - C. Need
 - D. Benefits
 - E. Qualifications of Personnel
 - F. Data Sources
 - G. Limitations and Contingencies
 - H. Scope
- II. Plan

- A. Objectives and Methods
- B. Timetable
- C. Materials and Equipment
- D. Personnel
- E. Available Facilities
- F. Needed Facilities
- G. Cost
- H. Expected Results
- I. Feasibility
- III. Conclusion
 - A. Summary of Key Points
 - B. Request for Action
- IV. Works Cited

These subsections can be rearranged, combined, divided, or deleted as needed. Not every proposal will contain all subsections; however, each major section must persuasively address specific information needs as illustrated in the sample proposal that begins below.

Introduction

From the beginning, your goal is *to sell your idea*—to demonstrate the need for the project, your qualifications for tackling the project, and your clear understanding of how to proceed. Readers quickly lose interest in a wordy, evasive, or vague introduction.

Following is the introduction for a planning proposal titled “Proposal for Solving the Noise Problem in the University Library.” Jill Sanders, a library work-study student, addresses her proposal to the chief librarian and the administrative staff. Because this proposal is unsolicited, it must first make the problem vivid through details that arouse concern and interest. This introduction is longer than it would be in a solicited proposal, whose audience would already agree on the severity of the problem.

NOTE *Title page, informative abstract, table of contents, and other supplements that ordinarily accompany long proposals of this type are omitted here to save space. See Chapter 25 for discussion and examples of each type of document supplement.*

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

During the October 20XX Convocation at Margate University, students and faculty members complained about noise in the library. Soon afterward, areas were designated for “quiet study,” but complaints about noise continue. To create a scholarly atmosphere, the library should take immediate action to decrease noise.

Objective

This proposal examines the noise problem from the viewpoint of students, faculty, and library staff. It then offers a plan to make areas of the library quiet enough for serious study and research.

Sources

My data come from a university-wide questionnaire; interviews with students, faculty, and library staff; inquiry letters to other college libraries; and my own observations for three years on the library staff.

Details of the Problem

This subsection examines the severity and causes of the noise.

Severity. Since the 20XX Convocation, the library's fourth and fifth floors have been reserved for quiet study, but students hold group study sessions at the large tables and disturb others working alone. The constant use of computer terminals on both floors adds to the noise, especially when students converse. Moreover, people often chat as they enter or leave study areas.

On the second and third floors, designed for reference, staff help patrons locate materials, causing constant shuffling of people and books, as well as loud conversation. At the computer service desk on the third floor, conferences between students and instructors create more noise.

The most frequently voiced complaint from the faculty members interviewed was about the second floor, where people using the Reference and Government Documents services converse loudly. Students complain about the lack of a quiet spot to study, especially in the evening, when even the "quiet" floors are as noisy as the dorms.

More than 80 percent of respondents (530 undergraduates, 30 faculty, 22 graduate students) to a university-wide questionnaire (Appendix A) insisted that excessive noise discourages them from using the library as often as they would prefer. Of the student respondents, 430 cited quiet study as their primary reason for wishing to use the library.

The library staff recognizes the problem but has insufficient personnel. Because all staff members have assigned tasks, they have no time to monitor noise in their sections.

Causes. Respondents complained specifically about these causes of noise (in descending order of frequency):

1. Loud study groups that often lapse into social discussions.
2. General disrespect for the library, with some students' attitudes characterized as "rude," "inconsiderate," or "immature."
3. The constant clicking of computer terminals on all five floors, and of laptops on the first three.
4. Vacuuming by the evening custodians.

All complaints converged on lack of enforcement by library staff.

Because the day staff works on the first three floors, quiet-study rules are not enforced on the fourth and fifth floors. Work-study students on these floors have no authority to enforce rules not enforced by the regular staff. Small, black-and-white "Quiet Please"

signs posted on all floors go unnoticed, and the evening security guard provides no deterrent.

Needs

Excessive noise in the library is keeping patrons away. By addressing this problem immediately, we can help restore the library's credibility and utility as a campus resource. We must reduce noise on the lower floors and eliminate it from the quiet-study floors.

Scope

The proposed plan includes a detailed assessment of methods, costs and materials, personnel requirements, feasibility, and expected results.

Body

The body (or plan section) of your proposal will receive the most audience attention. The main goal of this section is to prove your plan will work. Here you spell out your plan in enough detail for the audience to evaluate its soundness. If this section is vague, your proposal stands no chance of being accepted. Be sure your plan is realistic and promise no more than you can deliver.

PROPOSED PLAN

This plan takes into account the needs and wishes of our campus community, as well as the available facilities in our library.

Phases of the Plan

Noise in the library can be reduced in three complementary phases: (1) improving publicity, (2) shutting down and modifying our facilities, and (3) enforcing the quiet rules.

Improving Publicity. First, the library must publicize the noise problem. This assertive move will demonstrate the staff's interest. Publicity could include articles by staff members in the campus newspaper, leaflets distributed on campus, and a freshman library orientation acknowledging the noise problem and asking cooperation from new students. All forms of publicity should detail the steps being taken by the library to solve the problem.

Shutting Down and Modifying Facilities. After notifying campus and local newspapers, you should close the library for one week. To minimize disruption, the shutdown should occur between the end of summer school and the beginning of the fall term.

During this period, you can convert the fixed tables on the fourth and fifth floors to cubicles with temporary partitions (six cubicles per table). You could later convert the cubicles to shelves as the need increases.

Then you can take all unfixed tables from the upper floors to the first floor, and set up a space for group study. Plans are already under way for removing the computer terminals from the fourth and fifth floors.

Enforcing the Quiet Rules. Enforcement is the essential long-term element in this plan. No one of any age is likely to follow all the rules all the time—unless the rules are enforced.

First, you can make new “Quiet” posters to replace the present, innocuous notices. A visual-design student can be hired to draw up large, colorful posters that attract attention. Either the design student or the university print shop can take charge of poster production.

Next, through publicity, library patrons can be encouraged to demand quiet from noisy people. To support such patron demands, the library staff can begin monitoring the fourth and fifth floors, asking study groups to move to the first floor, and revoking library privileges of those who refuse. Patrons on the second and third floors can be asked to speak in whispers. Staff members should set an example by regulating their own voices.

Costs and Materials

- The major cost would be for salaries of new staff members who would help monitor. Next year’s library budget, however, will include an allocation for four new staff members.
- A design student has offered to make up four different posters for \$200. The university printing office can reproduce as many posters as needed at no additional cost.
- Prefabricated cubicles for 26 tables sell for \$150 apiece, for a total cost of \$3,900.
- Rearrangement on various floors can be handled by the library’s custodians.

The Student Fee Allocations Committee and the Student Senate routinely reserve funds for improving student facilities. A request to these organizations would presumably yield at least partial funding for the plan.

Personnel

The success of this plan ultimately depends on the willingness of the library administration to implement it. You can run the program itself by committees made up of students, staff, and faculty. This is yet another area where publicity is essential to persuade people that the problem is severe and that you need their help. To recruit committee members from among students, you can offer Contract Learning credits.

The proposed committees include an Antinoise Committee overseeing the program, a Public Relations Committee, a Poster Committee, and an Enforcement Committee.

Feasibility

On March 15, 20XX, I mailed survey letters to twenty-five New England colleges, inquiring about their methods for coping with noise in the library. Among the respondents, sixteen stated that publicity and the administration’s attitude toward enforcement were main elements in their success.

Improved publicity and enforcement could work for us as well. And slight modifications in our facilities, to concentrate group study on the busiest floors, would automatically lighten the burden of enforcement.

Benefits

Publicity will improve communication between the library and the campus. An assertive approach will show that the library is aware of its patrons' needs and is willing to meet those needs. Offering the program for public inspection will draw the entire community into improvement efforts. Publicity, begun now, will pave the way for the formation of committees.

The library shutdown will have a dual effect: it will dramatize the problem to the community, and it will provide time for the physical changes. (An antinoise program begun with carpentry noise in the quiet areas would hardly be effective.) The shutdown will be both a symbolic and a concrete measure, leading to reopening of the library with a new philosophy and a new image.

Continued strict enforcement will be the backbone of the program. It will prove that staff members care enough about the atmosphere to jeopardize their friendly image in the eyes of some users, and that the library is not afraid to enforce its rules.

Conclusion

The conclusion reaffirms the need for the project and induces the audience to act. End on a strong note, with a conclusion that is assertive, confident, and encouraging—and keep it short.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The noise in Margate University Library has become embarrassing and annoying to the whole campus. Forceful steps are needed to restore the academic atmosphere.

Aside from the intangible question of image, close inspection of the proposed plan will show that it will work if the recommended steps are taken and—most important—if daily enforcement of quiet rules becomes a part of the library's services.

In long proposals, especially those beginning with a comprehensive abstract, the conclusion can be omitted.

SITUATION REQUIRING A PROPOSAL

The proposal in Figure 23.2 can be considered a form of grant proposal, since it requests funding for a nonprofit enterprise. As in any funding proposal, a precise plan and an itemized budget provide the essential justification for a request.

The Situation

Southeastern Massachusetts University's newspaper, the *SMU Torch*, is struggling to meet rising costs. The paper's yearly budget is funded by the Student Fee Allocation Committee which disburses money to various campus organizations. Drastic budget cuts have resulted in reduced finding for all

state schools. As a result, the newspaper has received no funding increase for the last three years. Meanwhile production costs keep rising.

Bill Trippe is the *Torch*'s business manager. His task is to justify a requested increase of 20.6 percent for the coming year's budget. Before drafting his proposal, Bill constructs a detailed profile of his audience (based on the worksheet, page 65).

Audience and Use Profile for a Formal Proposal

Audience Identity and Needs. My primary audience includes all members of the Student Fee Allocation Committee. My secondary audience is the newspaper staff, who will implement the proposed plan—if it is approved by the allocations committee.

The primary audience will use my document as perhaps the sole basis for deciding whether to grant the additional funds. Most of these readers have overseen the newspaper budget for years, and so they already know quite a bit about our overall operation. But they still need an item-by-item explanation of the conditions created by our problems with funding and ever-increasing costs. Probable questions I can anticipate:

- *Why should the paper receive priority over other campus organizations?*
- *Just how crucial is the problem?*
- *Are present funds being used efficiently?*
- *Can any expenses be reduced?*
- *How would additional funds be spent?*
- *How much will this increase cost?*
- *Will the benefits justify the cost?*

Attitude and Personality. My primary audience often has expressed interest in this topic. But they are likely to object to any request for more money by arguing that everyone has to economize in these difficult times. I guess I could characterize their attitude as both receptive and hesitant. (Almost every campus organization is trying to make a case for additional funds.)

I do know most committee members pretty well, and they seem to respect my management skills. But I still need to spell out the problem and propose a realistic plan, showing that the newspaper staff is sincere in its intention to eliminate nonessential operating costs. At a time when everyone is expected to make do with less, I need to make an especially strong case for salary increases (to attract talented personnel).

Expectations about the Document. My audience has requested (solicited) this proposal, and so I know it will be carefully read—but also scrutinized and evaluated for its soundness! Especially in a budget request, my audience expects no shortcuts; I'll have to itemize every expense. The Costs sections then could be the longest part of the proposal.

And to further justify the requested budget; I can demonstrate just how well the newspaper manages its present funds. In the Feasibility section, I'll give a detailed comparison of funding, expenditures, and the size of the *Torch* in relation to the newspapers of the four other local colleges. This section should be the "clincher" because these

facts are most likely to persuade the committee that my plan is cost-effective. To avoid clutter, I'll add an appendix with a table of figures for the comparison above.

To organize my document, I will (1) identify the problem, (2) establish need, (3) propose a solution, (4) show that the plan is cost-effective, and (5) conclude with a request for action. My audience here expects a confident and businesslike—but not stuffy—tone. I want to be sure that everything in this proposal encourages readers to support our budget request. .

EXERCISES

1. Assume that the head of your high school English department has asked you, as a recent graduate, for suggestions about revising the English curriculum to prepare students for writing. Write a proposal, based on your experience since high school. (Primary audience: the English department head and faculty; secondary audience: the school committee.) Review the outline on page 584 before selecting specific headings.
2. After identifying your primary and secondary audience, compose a short planning proposal for improving an unsatisfactory situation in the classroom, on the job, or in your dorm or apartment (e.g., poor lighting, drab atmosphere, health hazards, poor seating arrangements). Choose a problem or situation whose resolution is more a matter of common sense and lucid observation than of intensive research. Be sure to (a) identify the problem clearly, give a brief background, and stimulate interest; (b) clearly state the methods proposed to solve the problem; and (c) conclude with a statement designed to gain audience support for your proposal.
3. Write a research proposal to your instructor (or an interested third party) requesting approval for the final term project (an analytical report or formal proposal). Verify that adequate primary and secondary sources are available. Convince your audience of the soundness and usefulness of the project.
4. As an alternate term project to the formal analytical report (Chapter 24), develop a long proposal for solving a problem, improving a situation, or satisfying a need in your school, community, or job. Choose a subject sufficiently complex to justify a formal proposal, a topic requiring research (mostly primary). Identify an audience (other than your instructor) who will use your proposal for a specific purpose. Compose an audience and use profile, using the sample on page 589 as a model. Here are possible subjects for your proposal:
 - improving living conditions in your dorm or fraternity/sorority
 - creating a student-oriented advertising agency on campus
 - creating a daycare center on campus
 - creating a new business or expanding a business
 - saving labor, materials, or money on the job
 - improving working conditions
 - improving campus facilities for the disabled
 - supplying a product or service to clients or customers
 - increasing tourism in your town
 - eliminating traffic hazards in your neighborhood or on campus
 - reducing energy expenditures on the job
 - improving security in dorms or in the college library
 - improving in-house training or job orientation programs
 - creating a one-credit course in job hunting or stress management for students

- improving tutoring in the learning center
- making the course content in your major more relevant to student needs
- creating a new student government organization
- finding ways for an organization to raise money
- improving faculty advising for students
- purchasing new equipment
- improving food service on campus
- easing first-year students through the transition to college
- changing the grading system at your school
- establishing more equitable computer terminal use
- designing a Web site for your employer or an organization to which you belong

SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT¹

In your nonprofit organization or your school, identify a particular need or project that requires outside funding. Search the Web to locate an appropriate funding program. Start by using words such as *proposal*, *grant*, or *funding* along with keywords that describe your project, such as *remedial programs*, *adolescent drug treatment*, and so on.

For a general listing of foundations that provide grants, go to the *Foundation Center* at <www.fdncenter.org>. For sources of education funding, go to *efundingsolutions* at <www.efunding.com>. For sources of science funding, go to the *National Science Foundation* at <www.nsf.gov>. For grant sources for nonprofit or public service organizations, go to <www.sils.umich.edu/~nesbitt/nonprofits/nonprofits.html> or “*The Grant Getting Page*” shown in Figure 23.3.

Prepare a short report for your agency that describes the types of projects funded by your chosen source, the average amount of a grant, the number of proposals submitted in a given year, the number of grants awarded, and the specific criteria this funding program uses in evaluating different proposals. Persuade your fellow members that your organization could qualify for a grant from this source. Attach copies of relevant Web pages to your document.

- What proposal reviewers want to know
- A proposal involves these basic persuasive tasks
- Proposals in the commercial sector
- Stages in the proposal process
- Criteria by which reviewers evaluate proposals
- Proposals in the nonprofit sector
- Submitting paperless proposals

23.1

For more examples of electronic proposals visit <www.ablongman.com/lannonweb>

FIGURE 23.1 Request for Proposal. The complete, 44-page RFP includes a project history and background. It also stipulates the types, frequency, and format of reports required, completion dates for various phases of the project, guidelines for submitting the proposal, and additional evaluation factors (such as the diversity of people in the study population and the proposal offeror’s record of performance on past projects).

SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH ARCHIVE COPY
<WWW.NHLBI.NIH.GOV/FUNDING/INITS.ARCHIVE>

Figure 23.1 REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL. (CONTINUED)

23.2

What is an RFP and how might you respond to it? Learn more at
<www.ablongman.com/lannonweb>

FIGURE 23.1 Request for Proposal. (continued)

- States purpose
- Identifies problem
- Proposes solution
- Details what will be done
- Details how it will be done
- Sets realistic expectations
- Encourages reader response
- Opens with background and causes of the problem
- Describes problem
- Describes one possible solution
- Defines scope of the proposed study
- Describes how study will be done
- Mentions literature review
- Cites a major reference and gives the writer's qualifications for this project
- Encourages reader acceptance
- Describes the subject and purpose
- Gives the writer's qualifications
- Explains how the job will be done
- Maintains a confident tone throughout
- Gives a qualified cost estimate
- Encourages reader acceptance by emphasizing economy and efficiency
- Unclear
- Revised
- Focus on the problem and the objective
- Gives background
- Describes problem and its effects
- Enables readers to visualize results
- Spell out the benefits
- Relates benefits directly to client's needs
- Promise only what you can deliver

23.3

For more on ethics
in proposals visit
<www.ablongman.com/lannonweb>

- Anticipates a major objection and offers a realistic approach
- Major ethical and legal violations in a proposal
- Provide adequate but not excessive detail
- Spells out what will be provided
- Make the proposal inviting and easy to understand
- Sell your ideas
- Gives a framework for interpreting the visual
- Visual repeats, restates, or reinforces the prose

FIGURE 1 Flowchart of Vista's Manual Routing and Billing System

- Make the audience's job easy
- Analyze the specific needs and interests of each major reviewer
- How to give each major reviewer what he or she expects
- How to cite sources and contributors

23.4

For examples of
oral proposals in
PowerPoint visit
<www.ablongman.com/lannonweb>

- Concise descriptions of problem and objective immediately alert the readers
- This section comes early because it is referred to in the next section
- Details help readers to understand the problem
- Shows how campus feels about problem
- Shows concern is widespread and pervasive
- Identifies specific causes
- This statement of need evolves logically and persuasively from earlier evidence
- Previews the plan

Tells how plan will be implemented
Describes first phase
Describes second phase
Describes third phase
Estimates costs and materials needed
Describes personnel needed
Assesses probability of success
Offers a realistic and persuasive forecast of benefits
Reemphasizes need and feasibility and encourages action

FIGURE 23.2 A Funding Proposal

◆ **CHECKLIST for Usability of Proposals**

(Numbers in parentheses refer to the first page of discussion.)

Format

- ◆ Is the short internal proposal in memo form and the short external proposal in letter form? (573)
- ◆ Does the long proposal have adequate supplements to serve the needs of different readers? (583)
- ◆ Is the format professional in appearance? (340)
- ◆ Are headings logical and adequate? (356)
- ◆ Does the title forecast the proposal's subject and purpose? (579)

Content

- ◆ Is the problem clearly identified? (579)
- ◆ Is the objective clearly identified? (579)
- ◆ Does each key element in the proposal support its objective? (581)
- ◆ Are ideas and claims supported with facts or specific discussion? (580)
- ◆ Is the proposed plan, service, or product beneficial? (568)
- ◆ Are the proposed methods practical and realistic? (580)
- ◆ Are all foreseeable limitations and contingencies identified? (580)
- ◆ Is the proposal free of overstatement? (581)
- ◆ Are visuals used effectively and whenever appropriate? (582)
- ◆ Is each source and contribution properly cited? (583)
- ◆ Is the proposal ethically acceptable? (580)

Arrangement

- ◆ Is there a recognizable introduction, body, and conclusion? (584)
- ◆ Are all *relevant* headings from the general outline included? (584)
- ◆ Does the introduction provide sufficient orientation to the problem and the plan? (584)

- ❖ Does the body explain *how*, *where*, and *how much*? (586)
- ❖ Does the conclusion encourage acceptance of the proposal? (589)
- ❖ Are there clear transitions between related ideas? (Appendix C)

Style and Page Design

- ❖ Is the level of technicality appropriate for primary readers? (581)
- ❖ Do supplements follow the appropriate style guidelines? (583)
- ❖ Will the informative abstract be understood by laypersons? (648)
- ❖ Is the tone appropriate? (271)
- ❖ Is the writing style clear, concise, and fluent throughout? (244)
- ❖ Is the language convincing and precise? (582)
- ❖ Is the proposal written in grammatical English? (Appendix C)
- ❖ Is the page design inviting and accessible? (583)

For more exercises, visit
<www.ablongman.com/lannon>

¹This exercise was inspired by Roger H. Munger's article listed in Works Cited.

FIGURE 23.3 **“The Grant Getting Page”**

This Web site offers a good starting point
for applicants seeking funding from federal and nonprofit granting agencies.

Source: Reprinted by permission of The University of Illinois at Chicago <www.uic.edu/depts/ovcr/ors/>.