The Key Ingredients of a Good Grant Proposal

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Key Ingredients

1. Clear statement of need
2. Explicit link to funder
3. Easy language
4. White space
5. Upside-down triangles
6. No silly mistakes

Key Point

- A lot of the work happens *before* you begin writing:
  - Determining exactly what you want to do
  - Stating exactly why your project is important
  - Defining exactly how your project fits with the funder's priorities
  - Deciding exactly what to include in your grant
- This is the *conceptualization* of your work
- It involves *thinking* not writing

1. Clear statement of need

- Your overall project objective and rationale
- States the problem you are going to address
- Sometimes your project will have multiple goals and objectives
- But you should define an overarching statement of need in <u>one sentence</u>

Need Statement

- Example:

To help improve primary school children's reading levels, speed, and comprehension, we propose a novel educational programme that combines assistive reading systems, training for teachers, and an innovative incentive scheme.

2. Explicit link to funder

- An effective proposal makes it clear to the reviewer that the project matches the funder's priorities
- Read request for proposals and instructions carefully
- Re-read the instructions and highlight:
  - Keywords the funder emphasizes or uses frequently
  - Statements that match your project's focus and goals

Links to Funder

- Read about other projects the funder has supported
- Make notes of *how your project fits with the funder's stated priorities and requirements*
- Incorporate these notes into your grant proposal, especially in any "summary items"
  - Covering letter, abstract, executive summary, conclusion
- Use the keywords the funder uses

3. Easy language

- Many grant reviewers are generalists rather than specialists and/or may not be experts in the specific field of your project
- They may not have specific technical or methodological knowledge for your project
- Effective grant proposals are written in easy, conversational language
- *Write it plainly*

Easy Language

- Short words
- Short sentences
- Short paragraphs
- No jargon and no clichés
- Avoid figures of speech and idioms
- Active better than passive

Passive vs. Active

- Passive:

  Research has been cited to demonstrate that an estimated 20% of primary school children are developing reading problems.

- Active:

  Researchers estimate that up to 20% of primary school children have reading problems.

Write it plainly

- Not this:

  Scintillate, scintillate, diminutive celestial body

- This:

  Twinkle, twinkle, little star

Write it plainly

- Not this:

  Nothing of great significance is achieved by becoming lachrymose over precipitately departed lactose fluid

- This:

  Don't cry over spilled milk

Write it plainly

- Not this:

  Based upon the plethora of previous research conducted across such diverse fields as psychology, sociology, higher education, and business and our own pilot studies undertaken at the highly prestigious academy where our innovative, novel systems have been tested and validated, children enrolled over the course of our study will likely demonstrate statistically significant improvements on scores designed to test children's reading levels, comprehensibility, reading speed, and attention spans based on psychometric testing within a year of the program being implemented, which will allow them to develop reading skills that will prepare them for middle school, high school, and university education.

- This:

  We expect children exposed to our novel reading system to improve reading performance within 12 months, which will ready them for successful advanced education.

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4. White space

- Do not feel obliged to fill every space in the grant application or maximize the word limit
- Readability for the reviewer is improved with some spaces between paragraphs and sections
- Careful use of font size, subheadings, indents, and bold/italics/underline can complement the use of white space

White space

Welcome to Grand Challenges Canada's online proposal development resource. As part of our mandate to fund bold ideas that improve the health and well being of people in developing countries by integrating scientific, technological, business and social innovation, Grand Challenges Canada has developed resources to assist applicants with preparing their grants in response to our requests for proposals. This online resource is intended to complement the in-person workshops we offer for specific programs by invitation-only. Recognizing that we cannot reach everyone with our specific in-person workshops, we hope this resource will help researchers and innovators around the world, whatever their area of study, develop their project proposals and maximize their chances of success seeking funding. Grand Challenges Canada is committed to supporting capacity building in less developed settings. The online proposal development resource offers general advice that is applicable to grant writing beyond the specific funding programs of Grand Challenges Canada. We encourage users to view, share, and build on these proposal development resources to accommodate their needs. All content is freely available for downloading and dissemination. The online resource is divided into three parts: Previously successful applicants discuss their experiences writing grants for Grand Challenges Canada and affiliated programs. Mechanics of writing – professional writers and editors provide advice on how to effectively communicate and organize proposals for funding. Perspectives of mentors – experienced grant writers and reviewers offer their views on what makes a successful proposal and their "top tips" for grant writing.

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Grand Challenges Canada is committed to **supporting capacity building in less developed settings**. The online proposal development resource offers general advice that is applicable to grant writing beyond the specific funding programs of Grand Challenges Canada. We encourage users to view, share, and build on these proposal development resources to accommodate their needs. All content is freely available for downloading and dissemination.

The online resource is divided into three parts:
Previously successful applicants discuss their experiences writing grants for Grand Challenges Canada and affiliated programs.

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5. Upside-down triangles

- Writing is effective when the reader knows where they are going
- The main building block of a piece of writing is the paragraph
- Effective paragraphs *begin* with a "topic sentence"
- Note: Academic or passive writing styles usually dictate that our paragraphs *end* with the topic sentence

Upside-Down Triangles

- More readable, and thus effective, paragraphs *begin with a topic sentence*
- These are like news stories:
  - Story in the first line; expand slightly on the story; give the evidence for the story; give the counter view.

Upside-Down Triangles

- Effective paragraphs are modeled after news stories

- Passive writing uses academic paragraphs

Topic sentence at top

Topic sentence at bottom
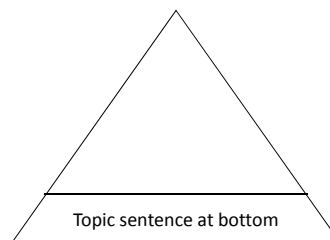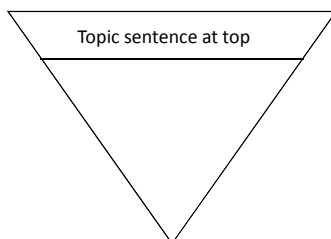
Example

Over three-quarters of school-age children in low- and middle-income countries have been shown to demonstrate inadequate reading performance. This deficiency has the potential to reduce the possibility of children continuing in school and reaching their full developmental and employment potential. Various educational interventions have been shown to help school children increase their reading speed and comprehension – these include computer software and hardware, access to reading specialists, and specialised training for teachers and parents. But these interventions have mostly been studied in developed countries like Canada and the US. They have not been widely studied in resource poor settings outside of North America. In Indonesia, the problem of reading skill is particularly worrisome – 80% of school children may not be reading at correct levels. Because of this great need research is warranted to understand whether assistive reading systems can help school children in rural Indonesia. **We propose to test and validate a novel, assistive reading system in rural Indonesia.**

We propose to test and validate a novel, assistive reading systems in rural Indonesia. Assistive reading systems, which involve computer technology, reading specialists, and training for teachers and parents, have been shown to improve students' reading performance in Canada, but they have not yet been well studied in low- or middle-income countries. There is enormous potential for novel interventions in the Indonesian school system because over 75% of children are reading at two levels below their grade and could benefit from tailored assistance that can maximize their ability to continue in school and reach their full developmental potential.

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6. No silly mistakes

- Most grant proposals are written for funders who hold a competition
- Most times the competition is fierce – *only a small proportion of all submitted grants will be funded*
- Why reduce your chances of success by making silly mistakes?

Silly mistakes include:

- Typos
- Word counts that exceed limits
- Page counts that exceed limits
- Using abbreviations that are unknown or undefined
- Not following instructions about:
  - Information to include in each section
  - The structure or headings to use
  - Fonts or other style requirements

Avoid silly mistakes

- Read instructions again carefully
- Use your colleagues, co-applicants, and/or spouse as peer reviewers
- Ask that they read your proposal to spot any typos or areas where you can cut words
- Spell out or avoid abbreviations
- Take a break from your proposal and return to it fresh for final editing

Good luck!