

# How to Write Better Business Proposals

by Carol Dunitz, Ph.D.

Meaningfully differentiate yourself through business proposals that trump the competition in content and style. We live in a world of fierce competition that makes it more important than ever for your prospect to understand that working with you is the best choice.

**Create an Outline.** Having an outline is the best way to keep your thoughts organized. It is a logical framework on which to build your proposal. It also ensures you do not leave out anything important. An outline is the basis for a strong presentation.

Make the outline. Set it aside. Then go back to it the next day and review it. Consider showing it to others whose opinions you respect. They may have something to add.

**Instill Visual Appeal.** There's nothing that beats a great first impression. Your proposal packaging should beckon the reader to open it and dive in. Use high quality stationery with your logo and high quality paper. Add spot color to focus your prospect's attention on issues they might find of special appeal. You might choose a special theme to run throughout the presentation that complements what you offer. Don't hold back when it comes to being clever, but don't be so clever it overpowers your message.

**Avoid Cookie Cutters.** Cookie cutters are for cookies. Using a template for your presentation is a turn off. Everyone wants to feel important. A template into which you plug information is not professional and will not instill confidence that you can get the job done. Let your prospect know how you can help them in fresh, clear language based on information in your outline. Write concisely with short sentences and short words.

**Customize Your Proposal.** Think about who will be receiving and reviewing the proposal and what might appeal to them. Consider their position in the company, culture, interests and anything else that may help you capture business.

**Add Peripherals.** You can increase your credibility by including testimonials and press clippings that are less than two years old. Ask clients you have already done work for if you may use them as a reference. High praise from others you have worked with can be very valuable. There's nothing like a third party tooting your horn.

**Follow Directions.** Complete your proposals as directed -- even if it means not following some of the advice in this article! And above all, don't miss deadlines. If you can't get a proposal in on time, why would a client expect their work to get done on a timely basis?

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