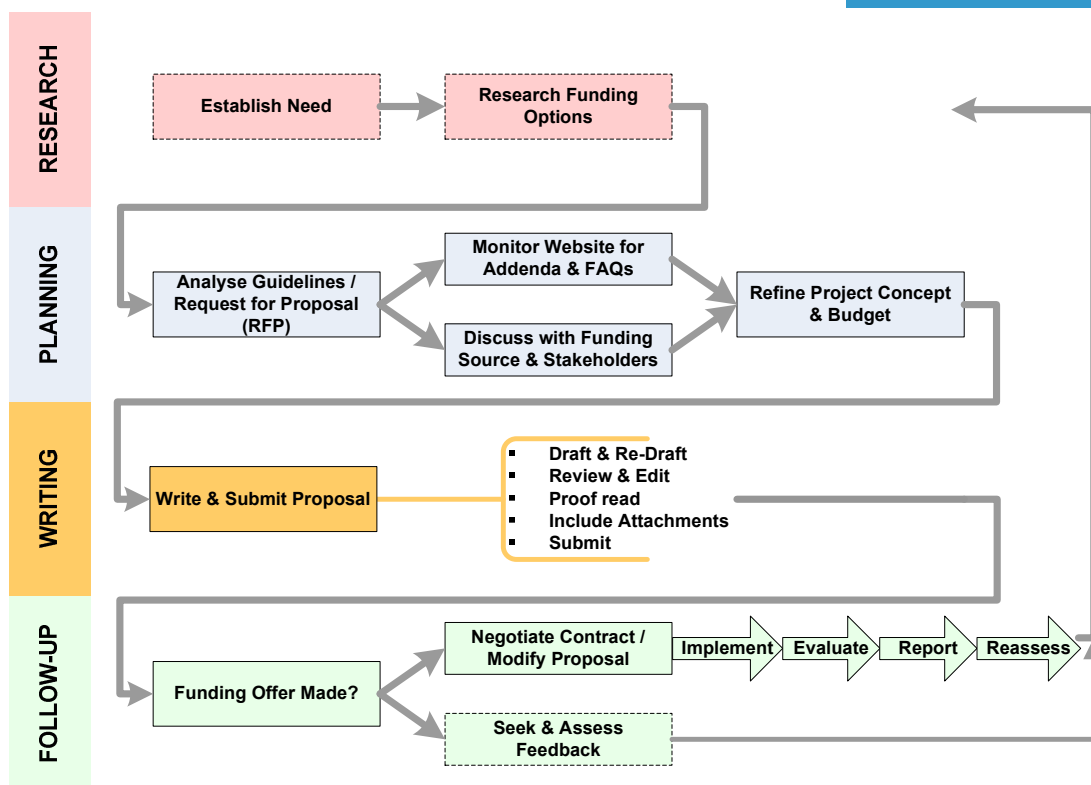


The Tender Writing Guide

When the “how” is as important as the “what”



The Tender Writing Guide

When the “how” is as important as the “what”

A guide for anyone in business or a not-for-profit writing a tender, grant submission or proposal.

Chris Chappell is a North Queensland based freelance management consultant. Author of countless successful tenders and funding submissions for businesses and not-for-profits, Chris has also worked extensively in Government running national funding programs and preparing numerous Cabinet Submissions and program budget proposals.

Further information: www.cichappell.com

Contact: chris@cichappell.com

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How to Use This Tool

Read this Guide in full.

Share it with others who will be involved in preparing your proposal/tender.

Read the Request for Proposal/Tender (RFP). Read it again.

Note all RFP requirements/questions that will need to be addressed.

Develop a Proposal Outline of your response to the RFP

Edit, add to and localise the draft to the geography and the service you're submitting for and as described in the RFP.

Constantly check your writing style and voice, using the tips in this guide:

- Is it appropriate to your audience?
- Is the language and usage appropriate?
- Is the structure consistent and logical?
- Have you made good use of visual cues?
- Do you have good design and layout?
- Is it in plain English

Redraft and redraft again, at least three times!

- each time check against your detailed analysis of the Selection Criteria
- check that you have demonstrated the Seven Traits of Effective Writing
- check that you haven't fallen into the common traps that lead to failed tenders

📌 Consider engaging a professional writer:

- 📌 To review, edit and proof read your draft.
- 📌 To prepare a portfolio of standard text about your business or organisation for ongoing use in tenders, proposals and presentations
- 📌 Go to www.cichappell.com or contact: chris@cichappell.com.

This document purposely uses the language of Tenders and the Request for Proposal (RFP).

Grant or funding submissions and business proposals are no different from a Tender – your proposal/submission is your one weapon in a highly competitive process.

Before You Start Writing

The Proposal Schedule

- Make one and stick to it!
- Work backwards from the proposal due date.
- Leave plenty of time for copying, binding, and delivering the proposal.
- Have a back-up plan for when the photocopier invariably breaks down.

RFP Analysis and Proposal Planning

Analysis of the RFP and planning of your proposal and the arguments supporting it is best done in a team of peers, colleagues, and stakeholders.

Learn what the lettered sections of the RFP are (e.g., Section B refers to your pricing; Section C is the scope-of-work, etc.).

Be aware that information critical to your bid may be scattered throughout the RFP.

Study the Evaluation Criteria including the points allocated to each criterion, as well as those allocated to cost. This tells you what to emphasize and where to put your efforts in preparing your proposal.

Study the Selection Criteria or Statement of Requirement. The narrative you provide in response will largely determine the success of your proposal (assuming that all basic requirements are met and your costs are reasonable).

Breakdown the Selection Criteria to identify all components that will need to be addressed.

Remember - every question must be answered, every requirement met and every claim proven.

Identify all keywords and themes in the RFP and Selection Criteria

- Keywords and themes provide important insight to the concepts and issues of importance to the purchaser.

Keywords can be:

- jargon (e.g. 'continuous improvement'),
- language (e.g. 'collaboration'), and/or
- models (e.g. 'child-centred practice').

Tender Writing Guide

Common keywords and themes are:

- Quality
- Value for money
- Collaboration
- Financial management
- Inclusion
- Case management
- Evidenced based
- Risk management
- Integrated
- Continuous improvement
- Client focused
- Access

📌 If you are planning to engage a professional writer to review, edit and proof read your draft, consider using their skills in the proposal planning stage. www.cichappell.com

The Proposal Outline

Prepare an annotated outline containing important points from the RFP and your analysis of it and notes of what you are planning to say in each section.

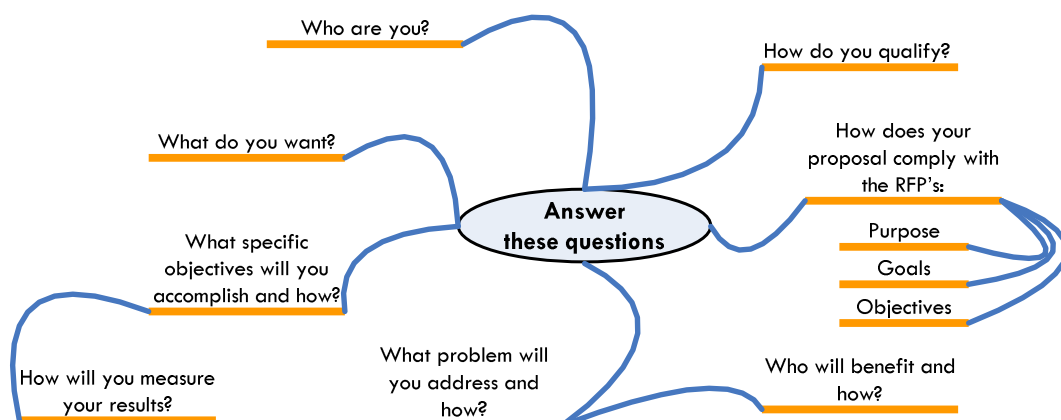
Reflect planning, research and vision throughout your proposal.

- Don't promise what you can't deliver
- Don't claim what can't be demonstrated or proved
- Don't take a "one proposal fits all" approach

Standardise the formatting of your draft, ensuring you meet the RFP requirements.

Copy your annotated outline file, save it under a different name, and delete the annotations. The result will be a basic outline which you can use for easier viewing and preparing your proposal sections and subsections.

Cut and paste the appropriate standard paragraphs from your existing documents into a Proposal Outline to create the shell of your response to the Selection Criteria.



Writing the Proposal

In tender and proposal writing, the “**how**” is often as important as the “**what**”.

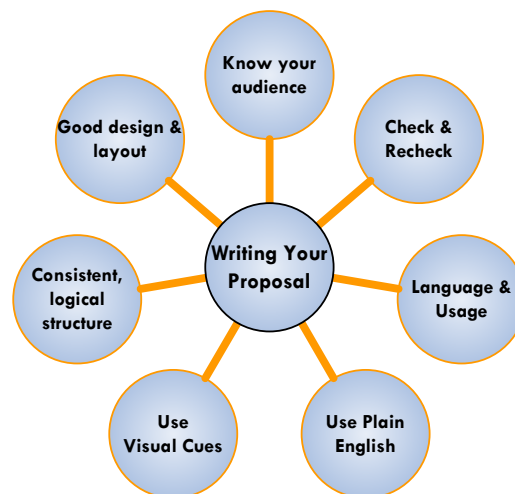
A structured argument, attention to specifications, concise persuasive writing, good presentation and a reasonable budget are the critical elements of the writing stage.

Demonstrate project logic and outcome, impact of funds, and community support.

Be specific about broad goals, measurable objectives, and quantified outcomes.

Write well:

- Do not waste words
- Use **active rather than passive verbs** and **descriptive nouns and adjectives**
- Use proper grammar and correct spelling
- Be clear, factual, supportable, and professional



Know Your Audience

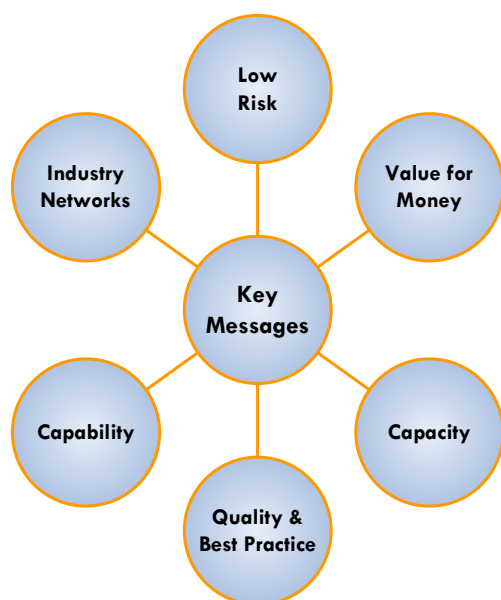
Your **analysis of the RFP and proposal planning** should provide you with the detail of what the purchaser requires in your proposal and how it should be presented.

Know and use the jargon, language, keywords, concepts and themes of the RFP.

Government purchasing is done within strict probity rules. You should assume that:

- Those reviewing your proposal know nothing of you and quite possibly little of your industry or sector.
- The reviewers will evaluate only the specific information contained in your proposal (unless the RFP states otherwise).
- Your proposal will be split between reviewers with each section being reviewed separately and independently.

In addition to answering the Selection Criteria, key messages to convey to the reader should include:



- You are the lowest risk option for the purchaser
- You have the experience (capability), infrastructure (capacity) and networks to deliver the requirements – without delay or risk
- You provide quality, best practice, evidence-based services
- You are collaborative. Your services are integrated and integrate with the broader service system
- You know the current trends and best practice and who else is working in the field and how you fit in
- Your proposal represents good value-for-money (not necessarily the cheapest)

Language and Usage

Your style should be non-technical, simple, consistent, concise and clear.

Emphasise end results, not tasks

Use the language and jargon of the purchaser and the RFP:

- Avoid jargon not in the RFP.
- Spell-out all acronyms on first use.

Use 'declarative' rather than 'conditional' verbs - avoid the words 'if', 'could', 'may' and 'might'. Instead, boldly declare that you 'will' deliver a positive outcome.

Use an active rather than passive voice when you can (e.g. "specially trained project staff will run all training courses" rather than "all training courses will be run by specially trained project staff").

Show that you care about the work

- Show some passion.
- Don't go overboard on emotion.
- Don't exaggerate.

Pitch the tone correctly. Be human and business-like rather than academic.
Check for spelling and grammar – get someone else to read and correct it.
Have your word processing software language set to English (Australian).
Revise, refine and rewrite.

Use a Consistent, Logical Structure

Organise your arguments (across the submission and within each section).

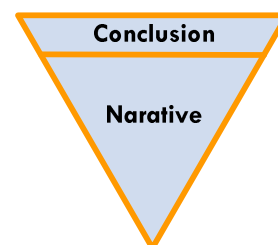
Use an inverted pyramid structure - conclusion first and then a narrative that demonstrates/proves your claims.

Use one point, and preferably one sentence, per paragraph.

Use informative headings and sub-headings, but do so consistently e.g. all headings in one lettering or size, all sub-headings in another.

Use attachments:

- While many RFPs limit the length of the response you can submit, you are often unlimited in the length and number of attachments you can use.
- Use Attachments to demonstrate or substantiate the claims you have made.
- Don't send so much that the reader gives up before they begin.



Provide Visual Cues

Use bold fonts or underlining to highlight main points (but do so sparingly and consistently).

Break-up text with headings.

Use tables, dot-points, graphs, and diagrams to:

- draw the reader's attention,
- breakup your narrative, and
- explain complex data, processes, structures, relationships and concepts

Design and Layout

Layout of the proposal is critical to its readability and therefore the reader's comprehension of your arguments and claims.

- Be consistent
- Follow the RFP's format and layout requirements
- Maximise the "white space" on the page by using wide margins, dot points, tables, charts and diagrams.
- Avoid overdone or fancy formatting and mixing too many font sizes or styles. Use different fonts and bold/italics sparingly and consistently.
- Do not right justify the text.
- Avoid long paragraphs. One sentence per paragraph is great, if not always practical.
- The shorter the sentence the better.
- Headings, sub-headings and lists make reading and comprehension easier
- Don't crowd the text.
- Use a clear font (and only one)
- Number your pages.

Use Plain English

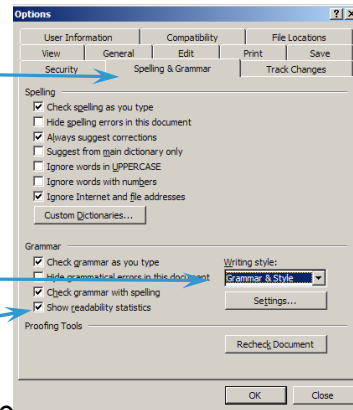
Say all that you want and need to, but in as few words and syllables as possible:

- Know your audience and write for that audience.
- Explain any acronyms.
- Organise your thoughts.
- Avoid long sentences and words.
- Omit unnecessary words.
- Be concise and direct e.g. try to make definite assertions.
- Use concrete, specific language.
- Use active language in sentence construction and choice of words.
- Use familiar words rather than jargon (unless it is the jargon of the RFP).
- Use text alternatives like diagrams and tables to present complicated information.

Monitor the readability of your writing by using the tools available in MS Word. Highlight the text you want to check and do a spell-check.

On the Tools / Options menu, Spelling & Grammar tab, under Grammar towards the bottom of the dialog box:

- Set the Writing Style to “Style and Grammar” using the drop-down menu
- Check the “Show Readability Statistics” check-box (the last one).



Once finished, you will get a dialogue box that includes three readability scores.

You're aiming for a score of:

- about 8 (or below) on the Flesch-Kincaid Grade and/or
- 55 or above on the Flesch Reading Ease scale (Reader's Digest magazine has an index of about 65 while Time magazine scores about 52. The first chapters of the Book of Genesis, King James version, has a score of 93.3)

Check and Re-check

Check the entire proposal for:

- technical consistency
- grammar and spelling
- page numbering
- section/subsection numbering or letting
- consistency of language, arguments, and themes
- consistency in appearance of headings, subheadings, font types and font sizes.

Find your best writer/reader and have them proof read for typos and readability.

Give it to a reviewer who hasn't been closely involved in the drafting.

📌 Consider engaging a professional writer:

- 📌 To review, edit and proof read your draft.
- 📌 To prepare a portfolio of standard text about your business or organisation for ongoing use in tenders, proposals and presentations
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Seven Traits of Effective Writing

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Organisation: | Showcases the central theme / claim / idea |
| Ideas & Content: | Clear and focused with relevant details that enrich the central theme / claim |
| Voice: | Speaks directly to the reader in a way that is compelling and engaging |
| Word Choice: | Words are powerful, engaging, and convey intended message |
| Sentence Fluency: | Sentences have an easy flow, rhythm and pace |
| Conventions: | Uses standard spelling, grammar, punctuation etc |
| Presentation: | Enhances the reader's ability to understand and connect with the message |

Common Reasons for Tender Failure

- Failure to follow the RFP instructions regarding organisation of the proposal, page limits, formats, etc.
- Failure to include all of the information requested in the RFP.
- Failure to take evaluation criteria and weightings into consideration
- Failure demonstrate an understanding of the problem
- Failure to fully address the Selection Criteria and/or tailor the response to the specific RFP
- Failure to submit the proposal on the required date and time.
- Costs/budgets are unreasonable (too high or too low), are incomplete or do not provide any detail (if required) for line and sub-line items.
- Insufficient specifics of the proposed approach and its management.
- Proposal is unprofessional in appearance (e.g., typos, blank pages, unnumbered pages, smudges, no whitespace, sloppy-looking, etc.).
- Proposal is poorly written (e.g., information is not presented/organized in a logical manner, proposal is difficult to follow, poor grammar, etc.).
- Proposal merely repeats or paraphrases the RFP.
- Proposal does not contain relevant information about the organisation, its capabilities, and/or its management and staff.
- Proposal does not demonstrate that the organisation has the personnel, the experience, and the capability to carry out the project.

Tender Words

Descriptive Words - Tender Writing Nouns & Adjectives

| | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Accessible | Creative | Heavily | Overall | Specific |
| Accurate | Crucial | Holistic | Over-arching | Stage |
| Active | Current | Hub | Partial | Stakeholder |
| Additional | Decrease | Ideal | Particular | Strategic |
| Adequate | Demand | Impact | Partnership | Strength |
| Advantage | Despite | Importance | Passive | Structure |
| Affordable | Detailed | Immediate | Perception | Struggling |
| Aim | Disadvantage | Inadequate | Popular | Subsequently |
| Alternative | Disconcert | Informed | Positive | Successful |
| Analysis | Disconnect | Infrastructure | Potential | Suffering |
| Aspect | Disengaged | Initiative | Powerful | Support |
| Asset | Distinct | Innovative | Powerless | Surrounding |
| Astounding | Diverse | Insignificant | Practical | Sustainable |
| Awareness | Easily | Interactive | Primary | Team |
| Balanced | Effective | Integration | Principal | Traditional |
| Barrier | Element | Isolated | Priority | Trend |
| Basic | Engaged | Key | Prior to | Upgraded |
| Benchmark | Environment | Knowledge | Problem | User |
| Beneficial | Essential | Lack | Process | Valuable |
| Beneficiary | Evaluation | Latest | Profound | Variety |
| Benefits | Evident | Level | Progress | Various |
| Best practice | Existing | Likely | Project | Vast |
| Capacity | Expertise | Limited | Proportion | Vibrant |
| Challenging | Extensive | Link | Protocol | Vital |
| Clearly | Facet | Local | Purpose | Vulnerable |
| Collective | Facility | Maintenance | Recent | Wellbeing |
| Community | Factor | Marginalised | Receptive | |
| Comprehensive | Familiar | Maximum | Regardless | |
| Concept | Fluctuate | Method | Region | |
| Connection | Framework | Minimum | Renew | |
| Consequently | Frequent | Multicultural | Resilient | |
| Considerable | Full potential | Necessary | Responsibility | |
| Consistent | Fundamental | Negative | Risk | |
| Consultation | Future | Network | Secondary | |
| Contemporary | Goal | Opportunity | Severe | |
| Context | Greater | Option | Significant | |
| Continue | Growth | Outcome | Skills development | |

Action Words - Tender Writing Verbs

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Access | Conduct | Entail | Instruct | Portray | Reveal |
| Account | Confirm | Envisage | Integrate | Prepare | Review |
| Achieve | Connect | Establish | Intend | Prevent | Risk |
| Act | Consider | Estimate | Interact | Prioritise | Sample |
| Address | Consult | Evaluate | Introduce | Process | Search |
| Advise | Contain | Exemplify | Invest | Produce | Secure |
| Advocate | Continue | Exhibit | Investigate | Progress | Seek |
| Aim | Contrast | Expand | Involve | Prohibit | Send |
| Allow | Contribute | Explain | Know | Project | Serve |
| Analyse | Coordinate | Explore | Lack | Promote | Share |
| Anticipate | Counteract | Extend | Lead | Propose | Show |
| Apply | Create | Facilitate | Learn | Prove | Signal |
| Approach | Decide | Finalise | Listen | Provide | Specify |
| Assert | Dedicate | Find | Maintain | Pursue | Start |
| Assess | Define | Focus | Maintain | Push | State |
| Assist | Demonstrate | Form | Manage | Qualify | Strengthen |
| Associate | Depend | Foster | Minimise | Raise | Stretch |
| Attribute | Derive | Fulfil | Mobilise | Realise | Struggle |
| Become | Describe | Gather | Modify | Receive | Succeed |
| Begin | Design | Give | Monitor | Recognise | Suffer |
| Believe | Desire | Govern | Motivate | Recommend | Suggest |
| Belong | Determine | Harness | Move | Reduce | Support |
| Benefit | Develop | Help | Need | Refer | Surround |
| Break down | Devise | Highlight | Negotiate | Refine | Survey |
| Bring | Differ | Hinder | Network | Reflect | Sustain |
| Build | Direct | Identify | Observe | Reiterate | Target |
| Capitalise | Discuss | Illustrate | Occur | Rely | Teach |
| Categorise | Distinguish | Impact | Offer | Remain | Tend |
| Change | Divide | Implement | Operate | Remind | Test |
| Choose | Educate | Include | Organise | Report | Train |
| Cohesion | Elevate | Incorporate | Outline | Represent | Transform |
| Collaborate | Empower | Increase | Overcome | Require | Translate |
| Combine | Enable | Indicate | Overlook | Research | Understand |
| Commit | Encourage | Influence | Participate | Respond | Undertake |
| Compare | Endeavour | Inform | Partner | Restore | Upgrade |
| Complement | Engage | Initiate | Perceive | Restrict | Use |
| Compose | Enhance | Input | Perform | Result | Validate |
| Conclude | Ensure | Inspire | Plan | Return | Verify |