

WRITING a good proposal is a critical skill in many occupations, from school to business management and geology. The goal of a proposal is to gain support for your plan by informing the appropriate people. Here's a guide to write a winning proposal:

10 Tips to a winning proposal

1 Make information easy to find

Use a table of contents for proposals over 10 pages. Arrange information in the order that's most important to the client.

2 Use headings to guide your reader

Give each proposal a title that stresses the main benefit to the client. Give each section a title that helps readers orient themselves. Express key selling points in subheadings.

3 Respond fully

Answer every question in the Request for Proposal (RFP), no matter how elementary or annoying. And make your compliance with the RFP obvious in your headings. Use the terms and jargon that the RFP uses.

4 Avoid banal headings

Don't say "Strategy Section" when you can say "Our 10- Step Plan to Increase your Sales." Use strong verbs in headings, especially verbs that stress benefits for the client.

5 Avoid business clichés

Avoid: "I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for considering the enclosed."

Get to the point: "Here is our proposal." Avoid: "If you have any questions, please feel free to call. That closing has been done to death, so bury it."

6 Be simple, direct, specific

Be specific rather than general, definite instead of vague, concrete rather than abstract. Instead of

saying "I am pleased to have this opportunity to submit to you this proposal that you requested for the marketing campaign for XYZ Company," say "I am pleased to

submit this proposal to provide marketing services in response to your ad."

7 Use concrete language

Avoid saying the general: "XYZ Company has considerable design experience in the areas of education and culture," when you can say the concrete: "XYZ Company has a combined total of 187 years of experience designing booklets, manuals and posters for schools, universities and museums."

8 Write in the active voice

Sentences written in the active voice are more direct and vigorous than those written in the passive. Don't say this: "The writing and designing of the book will be done by our company," when you can say this: "Our company will write and design your book."

9 Omit needless words

If you can cut a word and keep your meaning, cut. Rather than say

"The project plan which follows suggests a possible breakdown of task components and tentative timelines," say "The following plan suggests a breakdown of project tasks and timelines."

10 Sell your solution

Above all, avoid hype, padding and fluff. Support your recommendations with statements that stress benefits to the client. Remember that your proposal is a legal document that's part of the contract if you win.

