



When Text is Not Your Friend – or The Art of Not Writing

If I had a dime for every word I’ve ever written in a proposal, I wouldn’t be writing this now. I would be living on a beach somewhere worried only about my next tropical cocktail. Only articles *about* proposals could compete for the number of words written.

So why do we still read and write proposal sections that are numbingly bland or flagrantly puffy?

Because sometimes we don’t know what is enough and keep going until we “answer the mail.”

Because sometimes cutting and pasting seems like the right thing to do or *the only thing to do*.

Because sometimes we have to do and be everything and there doesn’t seem time to plan.

STOP. Let’s think about this. If you’re like me, you can’t remember lists of more than about 3 things. So, here’s a list of three things we can do to make our proposals readable, enjoyable, and effective.

MAKE YOUR PROPOSAL EASY TO READ

1. **Frame the question.** Most RFP sections ask you a question even though the item may be in the form of a requirement: “Describe your plan for retrospective review of hospital inpatient stays.” What’s the question you have to answer? “How are you going to get the work done?”
2. **Write an introduction** that tells the reader the important things in the section. One-two paragraphs, that’s all. Use a spell-checker and a style editor (like Hemingway). Then, answer the question:
 - a. Make a list of how you do the work.
 - b. You can add more text to the list to flesh it out.
 - c. Stop when you can read the list and know who, what, how, and when.
3. **Add your best proof points** using a call out box (like the one for item 2). Use color, and select proof points that are:
 - ▷ Obvious: *99% timely and reliable*
 - ▷ Relevant: *90% Staff retention over 5 years outperforms industry averages.*
 - ▷ Important: *We complete over 1.2 million reviews each year on-time, on-budget*

Easy to Read Means

- ✓ **Grade 6-9**
- ✓ **14 Words Per Sentence**
- ✓ **4 Sentences per Paragraph**

THE TAKE AWAY

According to Hemingway, this page takes 1:32 to read at a Grade Level of 6. There is an average of 10 words per line – no adverbs, no passive voice.

What if your reader could get your solution in one minute and 32 seconds? Would your scores improve? Would you win more? **Try it – you have nothing to lose but text.**