Writing a Compelling Project Narrative

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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

Objectives

- Identify different types of writing

- Recognize the parts of a grant proposal

- Understand what a project narrative is and its importance

- Learn how to tailor your project narrative to the funding agency

- Gain tips for better communication, specifically with technical information

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What is a grant?

- A grant is money (that does not need to be repaid) given to a person or group in order to accomplish something.

- Typically, organizations fund projects that are in alignment with their agency mission/ goals.

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Where do grants come from?

- **BAA** – Broad Agency Announcement
- **FFO** – Federal Funding Opportunity
- **FOA** – Funding Opportunity Announcement
- **NOT** – Notice
- **PA** – Parent Announcement
- **PAR** – Parent Announcement with Special Receipt, Referral, and/or Review
- **RFA** – Request for Application
- **RFP** – Request for Proposal
- **CFDA#** – Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number

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Now, let's take a step back...

1 Expository
- Usually explains something in a process.
- Is often equipped with facts and figures.
- Is usually in a logical order and sequence.

2 Persuasive
- Persuasive writing is equipped with reasons, arguments.
- In persuasive writing, the author takes a stand and asks you to agree with his or her point of view.
- It often asks for readers to do something about the situation.

3 Descriptive
- It is often poetic in nature.
- It describes places, people, events, situations, or locations in a highly-detailed manner.
- The author visualizes what he or she sees, hears, tastes, smells, and feels.

4 Narrative
- A person tells a story or event.
- Has characters and dialogue.
- Have definite and logical beginnings, intervals, and endings.

Types of Writing

There are various types of writing, each used for different purposes.

- Expository
- Persuasive
- Narrative
- Descriptive

Expository Writing

Writing in which author's purpose is to inform or explain the subject to the reader.

Example:
Advances in science and technology have made the use of "green" energy possible. Humans can harness the energy of the sun by installing solar panels on their homes or businesses.
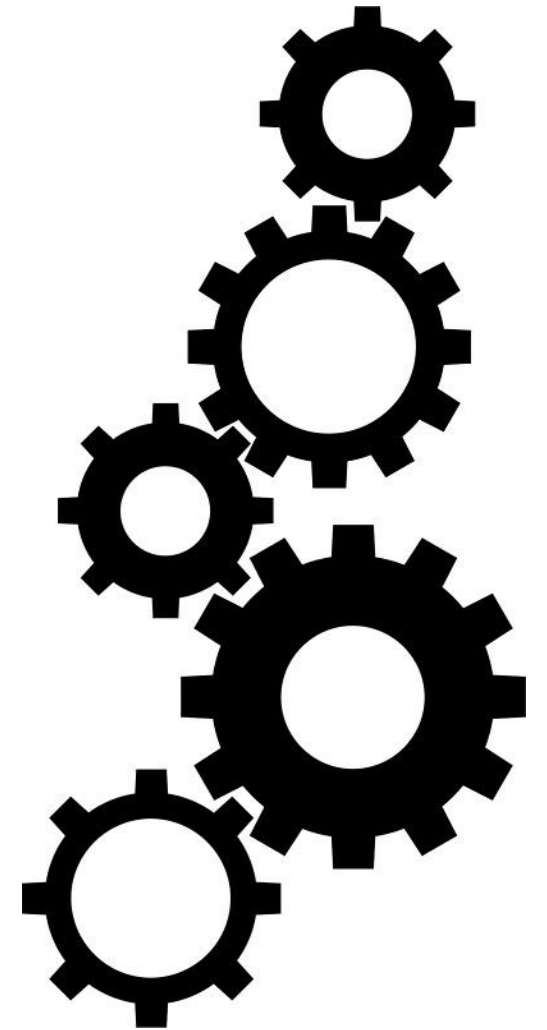
Descriptive Writing

A type of writing that uses the five senses to paint a picture for the reader.

Example:

It was a cold, grey day in late November. The weather had changed overnight, when a strong wind brought a granite sky and rain with it. Although it was only a little after two o'clock in the afternoon, the pallor of a winter evening had closed upon the hills, cloaking them in mist.

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Persuasive Writing

Writing that states the opinion of the writer and attempts to influence the reader.

Example:

Everyone should try mountain biking at least once in their life. It is great exercise, gets you outdoors, and is a fun activity to enjoy with friends.

Narrative Writing

Writing in which the author tells a story. The story could be fact or fiction.

- Often told chronologically
- The purpose is usually stated at the beginning
- It should be written with details and bright descriptions to involve the reader
- All details should relate to the main point of the piece

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Example:

Diane had a problem. Her ADD symptoms were affecting her work and she was on the verge of being fired. First, she asked if she could meet with her boss at the start of each day to prioritize her list of things to do, which he agreed.

Diane also asked for a flex-time arrangement, since she got her best work done when nobody else was around. The boss agreed to let her come to work late and stay late so she could have alone time at the end of her working day to be productive. The boss had to spend a few extra minutes with her overall, but he got a much more effective employee out of the arrangement.

So what is the Project Narrative?
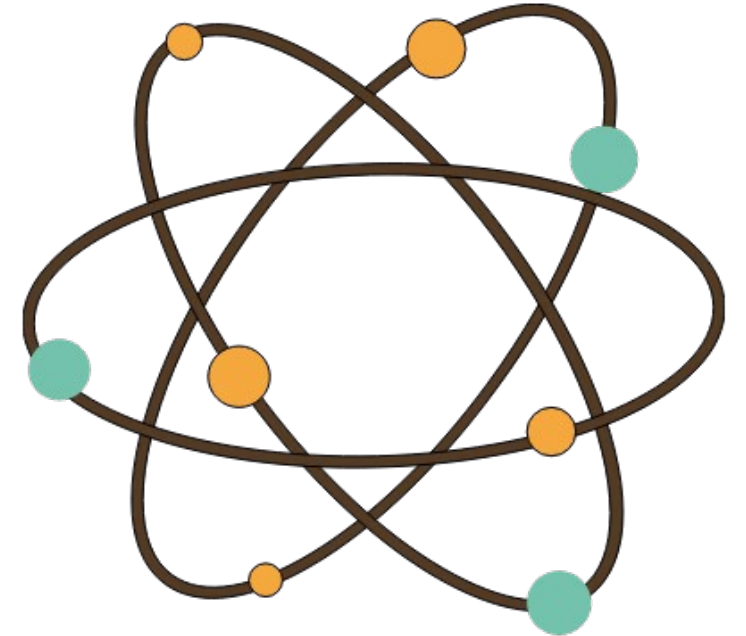
General Parts of a Proposal

1. **Introduction**
    *   Literature review
    *   Specific objectives and long term goals
2. **Rationale and Significance**
    *   How does the research fit the program?
    *   Relevance to body of science
3. **Research Methods (Most important section!)**
    *   Appropriate number of objectives for amount of time
    *   Description of studies/experimental design
    *   Techniques
    *   Expected results
    *   Analysis of data and interpretation of results
    *   Potential pitfalls, limitations, & options/contingency plan
    *   Schedule for completion of studies/timeline

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General Parts of a Proposal

4. **Budget**
   - How much money are you requesting?
   - Are there restrictions on how money can be spent?
   - Budget narrative – how will this money support the project goals?

5. **Supplemental Forms**
   - Sub-award documents
   - Institutional support
   - Personnel
   - Current and Pending

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# General Parts of a Proposal

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Project Narrative

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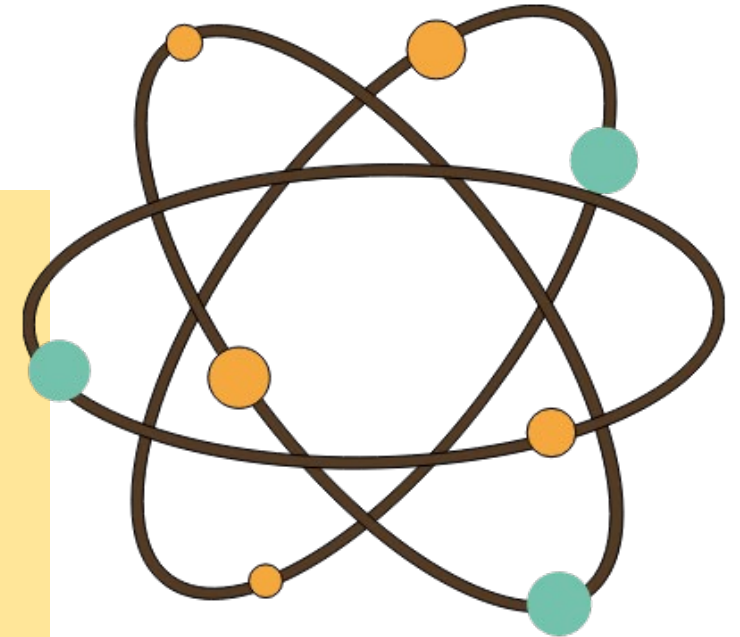
The Project Narrative

Scientific writing generally falls into expository writing, however it is called a project narrative **because it is telling the story of your project**.

Remember this when writing!

You are not simply stating facts, you are telling a story to the reviewers about the importance of your project and why it will achieve the goals you have set.
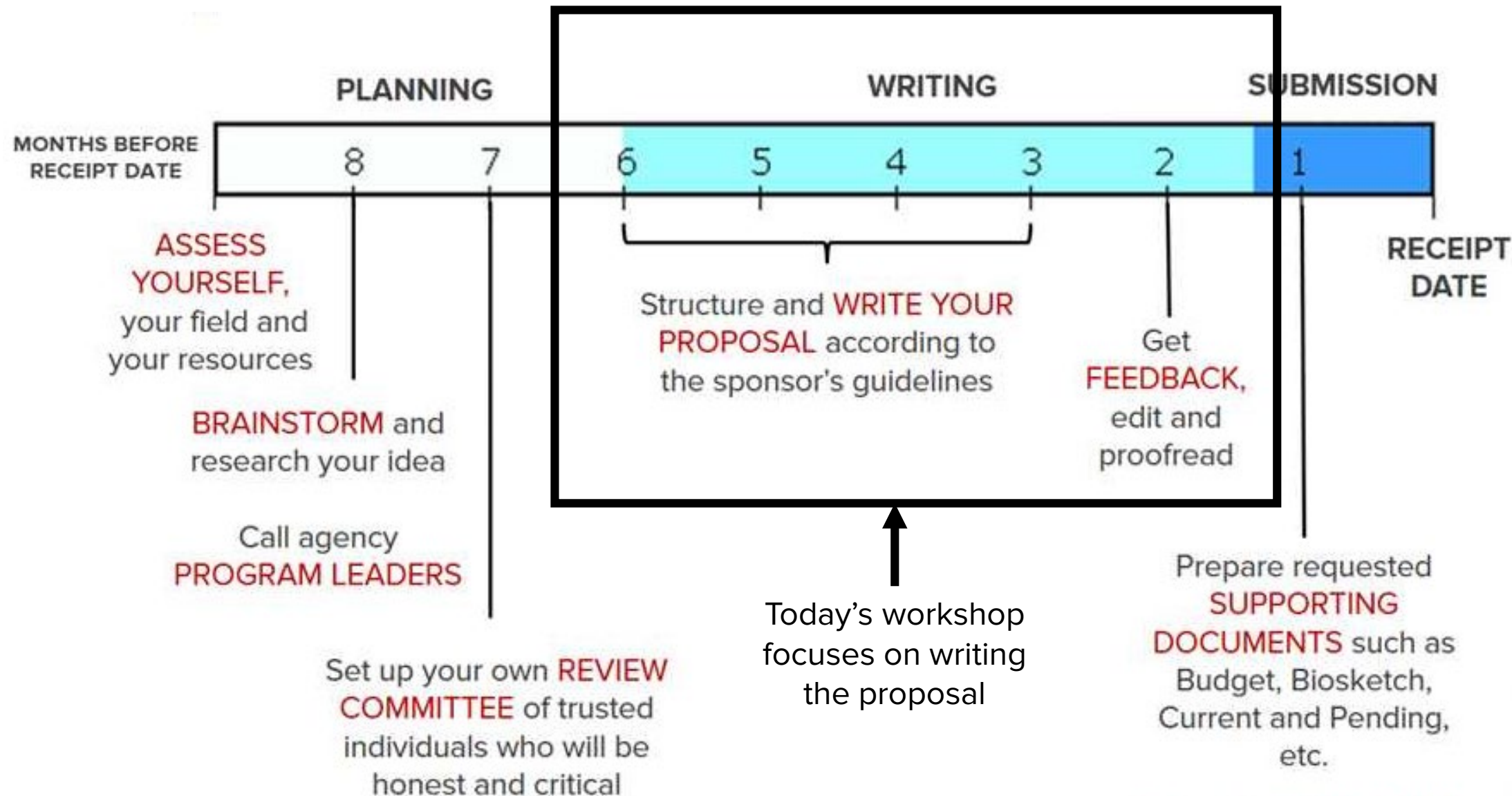
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Getting started: Read the RFP!

Read <u>all</u> instructions in the RFP and follow them

When in doubt, contact the National Program Leader or other program staff (this information is listed in the RFP).

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Before you start... make a PLAN.

PLANNING   WRITING   SUBMISSION

MONTHS BEFORE RECEIPT DATE

8   7   6   5   4   3   2   1

RECEIPT DATE

ASSESS YOURSELF, your field and your resources

BRAINSTORM and research your idea

Call agency **PROGRAM LEADERS**

Set up your own **REVIEW COMMITTEE** of trusted individuals who will be honest and critical

Structure and **WRITE YOUR PROPOSAL** according to the sponsor's guidelines

Get **FEEDBACK,** edit and proofread

Today's workshop focuses on writing the proposal

Prepare requested **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS** such as Budget, Biosketch, Current and Pending, etc.

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Things to Consider When Planning:

- Does the science/project fit this solicitation?
  - **<u>Don't try to make the solicitation fit the science</u>**

- Can you complete project in the specified amount of time?

- Do you have the right team/ collaborators?

- Does OSU have the facilities and resources to house the project?

- Does the project require special considerations such as an IRB or IACUC protocol?

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Writing the Introduction

- Statement of the problem – be <u>clear</u> and concise
  - What problem is your project trying to solve?
  - Make sure that this relates to problems that the agency focuses on

- Literature review
  - How does your research fit into the current body of science?

- Objectives and long term goals – <u>be specific</u>
  - Objectives should match up to the needs identified in the problem

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Writing the project narrative... *finally!*

How is the problem related to the agency?
Rationale and Significance

- Purpose of research – tie this very clearly to the problem

- Significance of the research to the field of science or the world
  - Use data to show the impact of the problem
  - Provide statistics and numbers when possible

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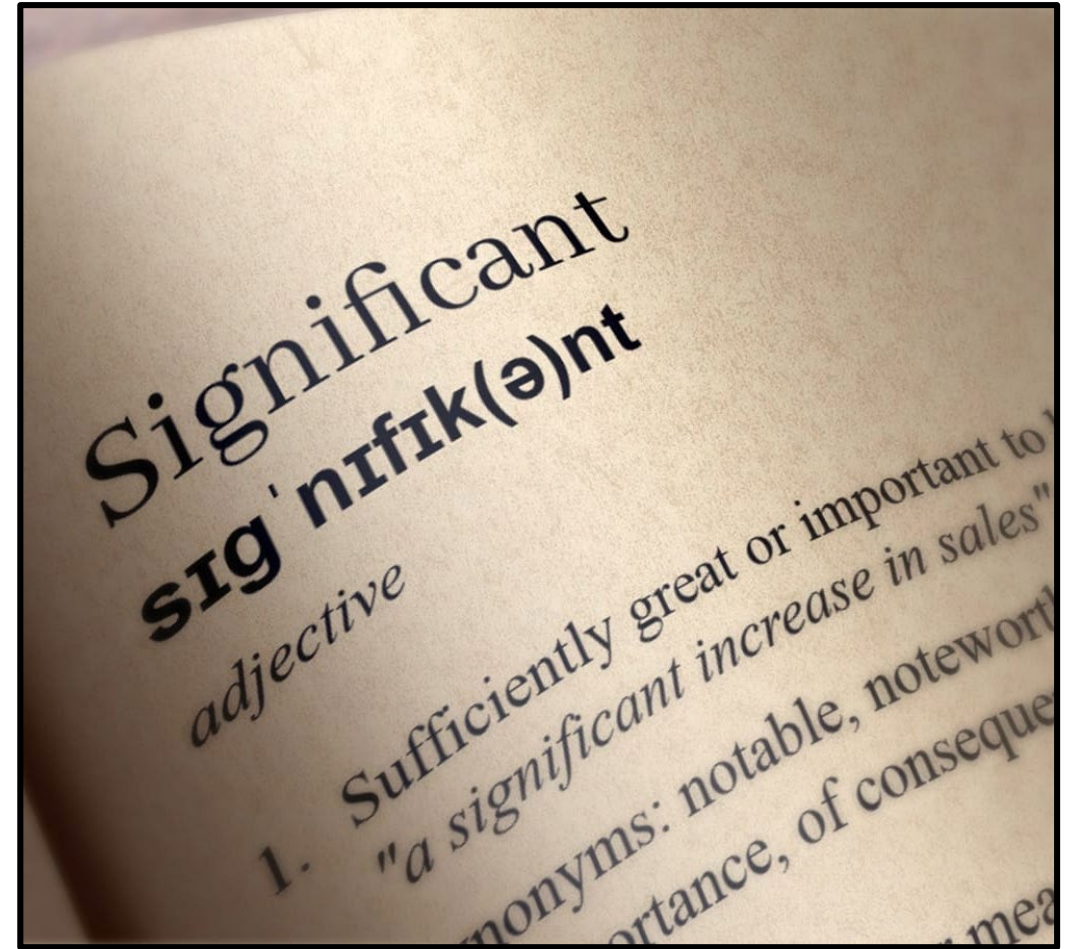
Tie Your Project Narrative to Their Mission

The mission of USDA-NIFA:

- *Invest in and advance <u>agricultural research, education, and extension</u> to **solve societal challenges**.*

In this case, you want to make sure that you are clearly stating how your project:

- Relates to agricultural research, education, or extension

- Will solve existing societal challenges

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What are you going to do?
Research Methods

- Define the appropriate number of objectives for amount of time allotted

- Describe the experimental design and techniques to be used
  - Are you using new methodology? If so, explain how these will improve upon previous methods

- Clearly list the hypotheses and expected results
  - How will you analyze data and interpret results?

- List potential pitfalls, limitations, and any contingency plans

How will you know its successful?
Creating Evaluation Criteria

- What will you measure to determine if your methods have worked?

- Your evaluation criteria should measure the objectives that you have outlined

- Focus on the big picture/ future impacts and broader outcomes

- Keep criteria relevant to the sponsoring agency

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Evaluation Criteria: Things to Mention

Outputs/ Results	Impact	Broader Outcomes
Measured results	Change in Knowledge, Action or Condition	Societally relevant outcomes, economic impact
Immediate	Short-term	Long-term
266 people attended a series of workshops on composting	Participants in the workshop have reduced household waste by 20% through composting	The community as a whole is now producing less trash, which is saving the city $$

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If there are specific goals that the sponsoring agency is looking at, try to include these in your project. For example, NSF has "Broader Impacts" that they are targeting and you can find example outcomes on their website:

Examples of Target Outcomes for Broader Impacts Activities:

- Full participation of women, persons with disabilities, and underrepresented minorities in STEM
- Improved STEM education and educator development at any level
- Increased public scientific literacy and public engagement with science and technology
- Improved well-being of individuals in society
- Development of a diverse, globally competitive STEM workforce
- Increased partnerships between academia, industry, and others
- Improved national security
- Increased economic competitiveness of the United States
- Enhanced infrastructure for research and education

Being successful

How do agencies select "winning" proposals?

- Often, a competitive peer review process
- The professionals that serve on these panels typically have a wide range of expertise
- **Reviewers may not be experts in YOUR field**

Reviewers read with these questions in mind:

- **Goals, Aims, and Outcomes**
    - What are we going to learn as a result of the proposed project that we do not know now?

- **Significance**
    - Why is it worth knowing?

- **Criteria for Success**
    - How will we know that the conclusions are valid?

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How do agencies select "winning" proposals?

What percentage of proposals submitted do you think are funded?

In FY 2016, *only 20%* of USDA-AFRI proposals submitted were funded.

Therefore, the stronger (and more understandable) your grant application is, the more likely it is to be funded.

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Winning proposals are a process of elimination, so focus on writing a proposal that can't be eliminated!

Which Pet is Mine?
Learn to use process of elimination and find my pet!
As you read each clue, cross off the pets that are not mine.

My pet has more than one color.
My pet has a long tail.
My pet does not eat bananas.
My pet is bigger than I am!

My pet is a _____

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General tips and tricks

Common Technical Writing Mistakes

- Poorly defined topic
- Lengthy sentences and big words/ jargon
- Scattered page layout/ hard to read
- Inadequate content
- Inconsistent tone or tenses
- Too abstract

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The Three "Cs" of Good Communication

- Be **C**lear

- Be **C**oncise

- Make your audience **C**are

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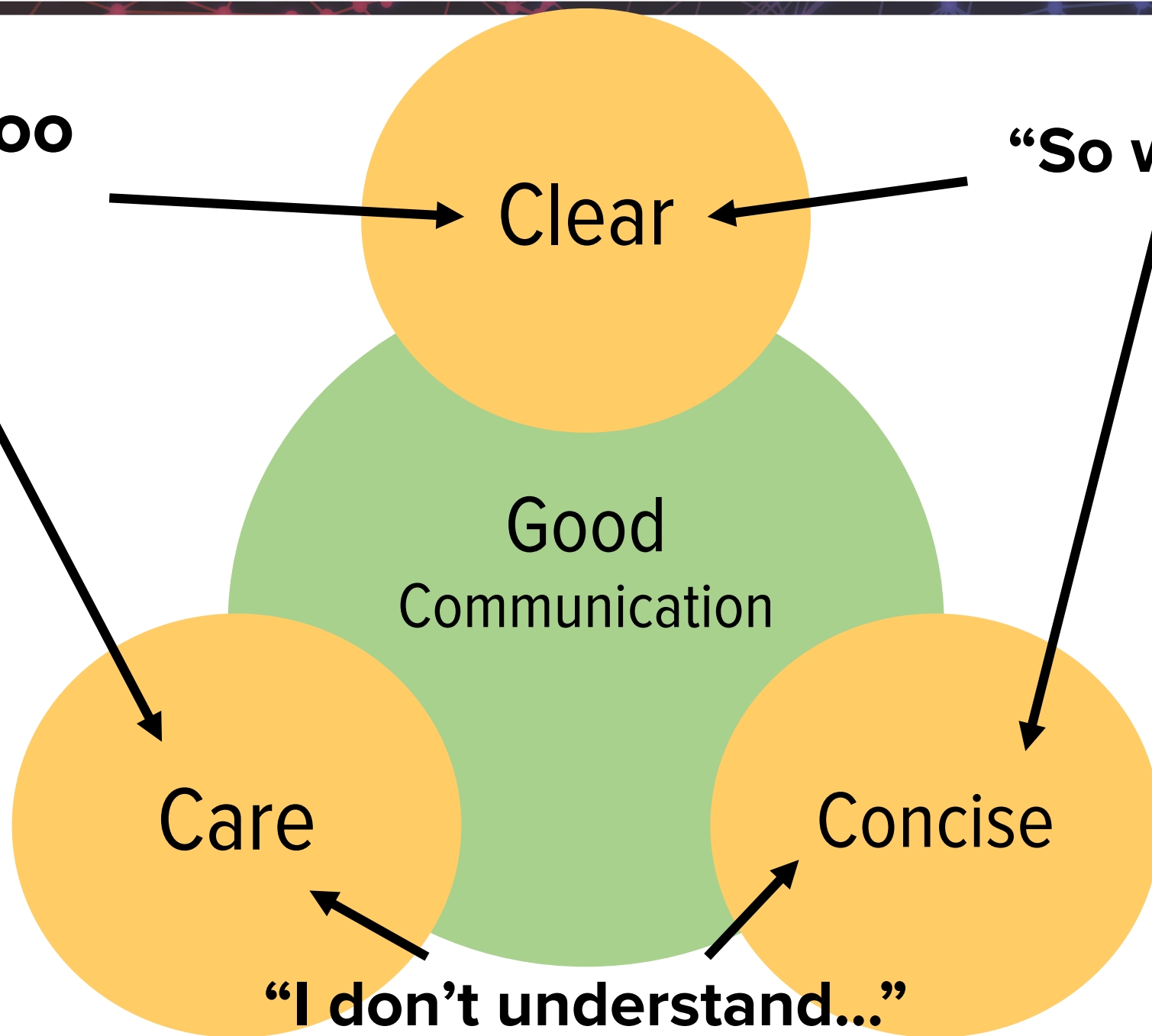
Be As Clear As Possible

- Ensure that the topic/ problem is clearly stated and all details relate to the main problem

- Have appropriate text spacing and fonts – don't try to cram in as many words as possible

- Anticipate questions that readers may ask and answer these in the text

- Use concrete details and numbers when possible

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Limit Hedging

- i.e. "X will happen under these circumstances."

"It is generally agreed that these new technologies will transform everyday life."   VS.   "These new technologies will transform everyday life."

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Keep it short

- **<u>Don't</u>** include unnecessary information

- **<u>Don't</u>** use jargon

- **<u>Don't</u>** get bogged down with details

- **<u>Do</u>** revise!
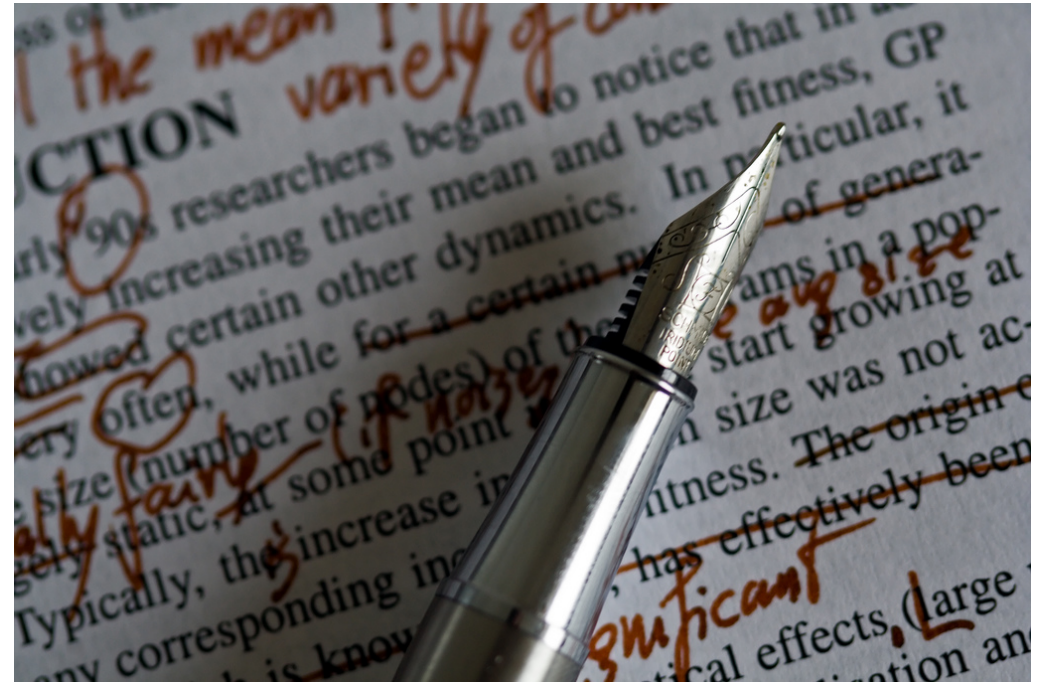
"If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out."
George Orwell

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If your proposal is...

{
an innovative idea that addresses the problem,
in alignment with agency goals and values,
science-based, with well-designed experiments,
able to measure success,
working toward a long-term outcome with significant impacts,
follows all guidelines,
and is communicated clearly
}

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it's a Clear winner.

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References

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National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2017). *Communicating Science Effectively: A Research Agenda.* Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Sperber, Dan. (1995). "How do we communicate?" *How Things Are: A science toolkit for the mind.* New York: Morrow: 191-199.

https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/grant-proposals-or-give-me-the-money/

SEEDS Student RFP Presentations

Columbus – 214 Ag. Admin

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 1-2pm AND Thursday, Nov. 14, 10-11 am

Wooster – 126 Research Services

Friday, Nov. 15, 10:30-11:30am AND 1:00-2:00pm

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