

Ways to Improve Your Proposal Writing

Nobody likes to read bad writing. It's hard work! If you're writing a grant or project proposal, use the tools on this page to make your message clear and effective.

Get an instant idea of how easy or difficult your text is to read by using a fog index. Try:

gunning-fog-index.com



Idea of fog index ratings

Popular novels 10
 Time/Newsweek 11
 Guardian Weekly 12
Grant proposals 12-14
 Journal articles >14
 Agenda 2030 16-18
 Policies 16-18
 Laws >18

10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18+

Low fog index:

plain language, wide readership, easy to read

High fog index:

complex words, long sentences, intellectual audiences, harder to read

For your text to read well and sustain interest, aim for:

- > General professional writing 10-15
- > Project proposals 12-14

Use inductive and deductive approaches to organise your ideas

INDUCTIVE

1) Start with data, evidence, examples

2) Present the main points

3) Put the conclusion at the end

DEDUCTIVE

1) Start with your conclusion

2) Present the main points

3) Back up main points with data, evidence, examples



- Scientific approach with conclusion last.
- Best for academics, scientists and 'old-fashioned' audiences.

- Makes readers read everything before your conclusion.
- Readers may draw their own conclusion as they're reading – it could be different from yours.



- Readers see your conclusion first and therefore the meaning and importance.
- Helps busy readers grasp your message quickly.
- Saves readers time.
- Shows that you want your conclusions to be understood.
- Not helpful when giving bad news.

These approaches can apply to paragraphs or sections of your document.

The deductive approach helps you put the most important information first.

If you want to shock your reader...



...don't use numbers!

- ✓ Write "shocking" if you want your reader to feel shocked, "worrying" if you want your reader to worry, and so on.
- ✓ Grab attention by starting paragraphs with emotive lead-in sentences that relate to your central argument.
- ✓ Then back up your claims/opinions with data later.



Examples of lead-in sentences

The upward trend in violence against women is **alarming**.

Not even one quarter of girls in X district follow secondary education.

Natural population growth is **impossible for several reasons**.

Government attempts to transform youth employment have been **unsuccessful**.

Some words that spark interest

high
 low
 limited
 widespread
 proven

suitable
 beneficial
 serious
 encouraging
 satisfactory

disturbing
 alarming
 shocking
 unsuccessful
 impossible

Writing with style



- **Know your audience** before you write.
- Always **have your reader in mind** and what they want to know.
- Keep your writing **simple and natural**.
- Limit the jargon – stick to **known terminology**.
- Put points you want to **emphasise at the beginning** of a sentence.
- Be **clear and confident**.



- Don't write what you wouldn't normally say.
- Avoid slang, idioms and humour.
- Don't try to show off how much you know.
- Don't introduce unusual words.
- Avoid lengthy sentences – they're harder to remember.
- Don't write more than you need to.

Ways to brighten up your writing

QUESTIONS

Insert a question here and there. Questions break the narrative style and wake up the reader, e.g.

*What are some of the challenges facing young women?
 What causes elephants to raid crops?
 What have been the major benefits of renewable energy?*

Make sure to answer the question immediately afterwards. But take care not to go wild and put in a question in every paragraph!

WRITE WITH CONFIDENCE

If you're writing a report or a project proposal, **you** are the expert. You need to be especially concrete and confident when writing about plans, findings and recommendations.

Therefore, **avoid these words as much as you can**:

hope perhaps might may could quite possibly believe

Instead of "it is perhaps due to ..." write "it is due to ..."
 Instead of "it might take six months" write "it will take up to six months"

AVOID WORDINESS

Choose short words and keep to the point. A good trick is to ask yourself, "Would I say that?" If not, find a plainer alternative, e.g.

*constitute a serious constraint >> limit or weaken
 utilise >> use
 accelerate >> speed up
 from its inception >> from the start
 high priority >> priority*

Delete phrases like "many will agree that", "as far as we are concerned", "as you already know" – they don't carry any relevant meaning.

**** Use the A-Z of Alternative Words by the Plain English Campaign ****



Colorful lightbulbs on light background by Zamurovic Brothers from Noun Project

USE THE ACTIVE VOICE

We speak mostly in the active voice, so do the same with writing. It's more natural and easier to follow. Only use the passive voice if you have a good reason.

Compare:

The learnings from each project will be shared by the project manager vs *The project manager will share the learnings from each project*

Which is clearer, gives an impression of action and directly tells you who is responsible?

CHOOSE VERBS OVER NOUNS

Verbs = action, e.g.

*participation >> participate
 implementation >> implement
 modification >> modify*

LISTS GET TO THE POINT

Bulleted lists are useful for:

- Highlighting information
- Breaking up paragraphs
- Making your page visually interesting

BE GENDER-NEUTRAL

Use gender-neutral nouns, e.g. *humankind, police officer, chair*
 Use plurals and the singular "they" or "their" to avoid gender bias.



Targets for improving your fog index

- > Vary the lengths of your paragraphs but try to keep under 200 words
- > Keep your average sentence length to around 15-18 words
- > Use short words where possible
- > Cut out unnecessary words



Be aware that your writing reflects who you are.

Think of your reader, their style and their attention spans.

If you don't say it, don't write it!

Sources:
copywritercollective.com/copywriting-tips-the-gunning-fog-index/
eldtraining.com/uploads/4/1/9/8/41988625/professional_writing.pdf
en.unesco.org/system/files/guidelines_for_pp_-_annex_3.pdf
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plainenglish.co.uk/the-a-z-of-alternative-words.html
unicheck.com/blog/principles-for-clearer-professional-writing

Want more help with your proposal or other writing?
 Get in touch with Sally at contact@omniawritingservices.com

