



Ten Tips: Writing Great Proposals

TIP 1: A great proposal is persuasive and “on message”

Develop a strategy to win the business. For example, select one or more key differentiators between you and the competition. Make each section highlight the key differences. Try to create the best argument that will win the mind of the prospect—show that you know best how to solve the prospect's need or problem. Once you have determined a strategy and key message, write persuasively and convincingly. Don't mince words. Make everything in the proposal be on message and leave out extraneous information.

TIP 2: Empathize with your customer

Customers can get anxious because they don't want to make mistakes in buying decisions. It is up to you to make your prospects feel confident that choosing your firm is the correct decision and that they will be better off with your firm than with any other. People often feel comfortable dealing with companies and people like themselves, who understand them, and are trustworthy. Make prospects feel comfortable that you share the same values and have trustworthy people on your team—give examples and references. Though it's just paper, if you write well you can gain their trust.

TIP 3: Demonstrate your added value

Articulate your value proposition. Explain clearly what differentiates you, and why you and your firm add value that no other company can duplicate.

TIP 4: Make it easy on the reader

Make your proposals inviting and easy to read. Engage the reader, be clear, anticipate questions, and answer them. Talk about your prospect and identify key issues. Avoid industry jargon; if your proposal is not easy to read and understand, the prospect will put it down and may never come back if your competition gives them an easier to understand solution.

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TIP 5: Expected results can be convincing

Spice up your proposals by reminding the client of the end goal. Make an argument come to life with facts and statistics on expected results based on past cases. This will show that you're familiar with what you do and you've been down this road before. Remember to make your projections realistic though, as you'll have to live up to your promises.

TIP 6: Write in straightforward language

Write clearly. Use simple language, be direct and persuasive. Don't use buzz words or technical words. Get a good writer to help—enlist the best writer at your company (or a professional) to make the language strong and crisp, and proof your proposal. Ask those not familiar with your business to read the proposal and make sure that they understand it; if they understand it, chances are your prospect will as well.

TIP 7: Keep your proposals consistent

While your prospects may see one or two proposals from you, you never know when a sales rep may leave your firm. It's important that others can pick up where they left off and be familiar with your proposal process. If you send multiple proposals to the same client (whether from different divisions of your firm or multiple times from your division), if they see a consistent style and messaging they will in turn know that your firm has an overall strategy and mission—making them feel comfortable working with different parts of your company or expecting similar results each time you work with them.

TIP 8: Make sure you have excellent graphic design

Leave plenty of white space to let the prospect's eye “rest.” The proposal should clearly identify your firm, and a solid graphic design can add emotion to the proposal, which aids in recall and building trust. The design must be unobtrusive—the goal is to ensure that your prospect reads the proposal. Use images appropriately. If you do not have a graphic designer on staff, you can find a freelancer to create a template that you can use. The goal is to give yourself a professional, visual edge.

TIP 9: Proofread your proposals

Don't send out a document unless it has been thoroughly proofread—for grammar, content, and claims.

- Make sure you ran a spell check.
- Read the proposal and make sure it's politically correct.
- Find out if your proposals need a legal review by a lawyer or counsel.
- Review every page to make sure it's on strategy.

When you're all done, read it two more times.

TIP 10: Keep your proposals as short as possible

Get the important information out quickly. This makes it easier on the reader and forces you to “stay on message.”