Getting Winning Prose from Non-Professional Writers

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…Because There is No Second Place in Proposals™

Help Your SMEs Uncover Self-Limiting Beliefs About Writing

- **Do they believe they're no good at writing?**

- **What specifically makes them feel so?**

- **Has someone else told them this or is there a little "voice" in their heads judging them?**

- **Do they simply dislike writing?**

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What do you dislike about writing?

- ❑ The typing itself or the challenge of putting thoughts into words?
- ❑ The effort of organizing the ideas into a logical order?
- ❑ The writing not well-connected to what you are trying to say?
- ❑ Appearing to be "padding" to fill the pages after getting the basic idea across?
- ❑ Failing to find the right words?
- ❑ Seeing too many connections so it's hard to structure the thoughts or focus?
- ❑ Fear of seeming incompetent or not as smart when your section doesn't come out quite as intended?
- ❑ The dread of how long the writing takes, how much time this proposal is going to steal out of your life?

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The Correct Writing Process

- **Three distinct stages: research, writing, editing**

- **40-20-40 Rule**

- **When skipped or tackled out of order, writing is painful and time-consuming**

- **Mixing is the mother of all writer's block**
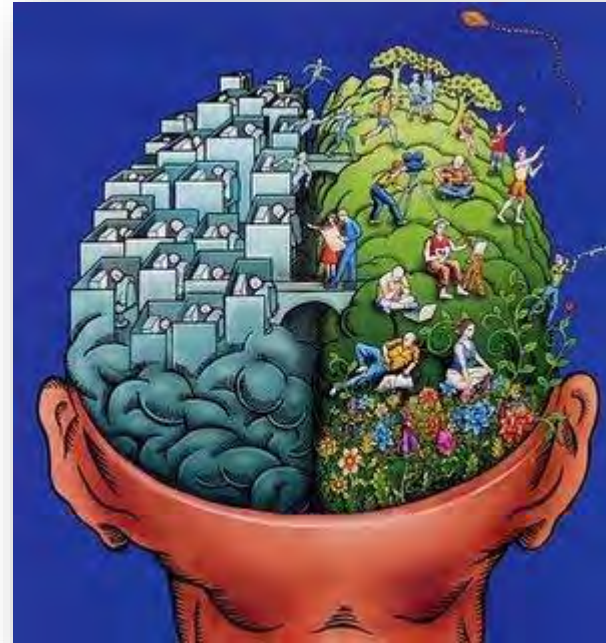
Logical, sequential, rational, analytical, objective, and focused on parts

Creative, random, intuitive, holistic, synthesizing, subjective, and focused on wholes

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Stage 1: Research, Brainstorming, Planning

- **Takes at least 40% of the proposal duration**

- **Includes:**
  - Researching
  - Brainstorming as a group
  - Brainstorming by yourself
  - Section planning
  - Answering Work Package questions
  - Developing graphics

Brainstorming in a Group

Brainstorming is often under-appreciated and runs ad-hoc; instead, it should be run as a carefully planned and orchestrated session

- **The success is in skillful facilitation**

- **Assign a lead and a time-keeper**

- **Have a clear agenda and process**
  1. Warm up (Getting your team in a creative mindset)
  2. Idea generation without judgment (chaotic)
  3. Organizing
  4. Streamlining and troubleshooting

- **Keep reminding the team:**
  - Where they are in the process
  - Where they have been
  - Where they are going

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First Two Steps of Effective Brainstorming

You may find that many good thinkers stay within the confines of their current notions until you help them come up with new ideas to help beat your competition

- **Step 1: Warm up and get Creative**

  - Recall stories of brilliance and how it felt

  - How did you figure out something that wasn't clear before, came up with a clever idea, fixed something tricky, or otherwise felt smart?

- **Step 2: Generate massive quantity of ideas**

  - Go for quantity of the ideas without judging

  - Write your ideas on post its and put them up on the wall in loose order or without any order

  - Reframe tasks: What if it were an ideal world? What if we were solving another problem?

  - ID self-limiting assumptions and reframe: "How can we…"

  - Keep sense of humor

  - Move about, switch up leads, embrace chaos and outlandish ideas

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Steps 3 & 4: Organizing & Streamlining/Troubleshooting

This part of the brainstorming session is easier than the first for most technical personnel as it is dominated by the left hemisphere of the brain

- **Organize your post-its by major topics**

- **Remove duplicates and sort through ideas**

- **Refine and build on good ideas**

- **Fill in gaps (think 8Ws and un-addressed requirements) and make decisions**

- **Stop the session as soon as you are ready to write**

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Using the 8 Ws

*8Ws ensure comprehensive approach to covering all bases in brainstorming. In writing, the order of Ws matters for greater persuasion to make your sections **compelling** by design.*

Why: Customer problem, challenge, or key risk factor behind the requirement

What: What do we propose to do in response to the requirement?

Who: Who exactly is going to do this part of work, by name and title?

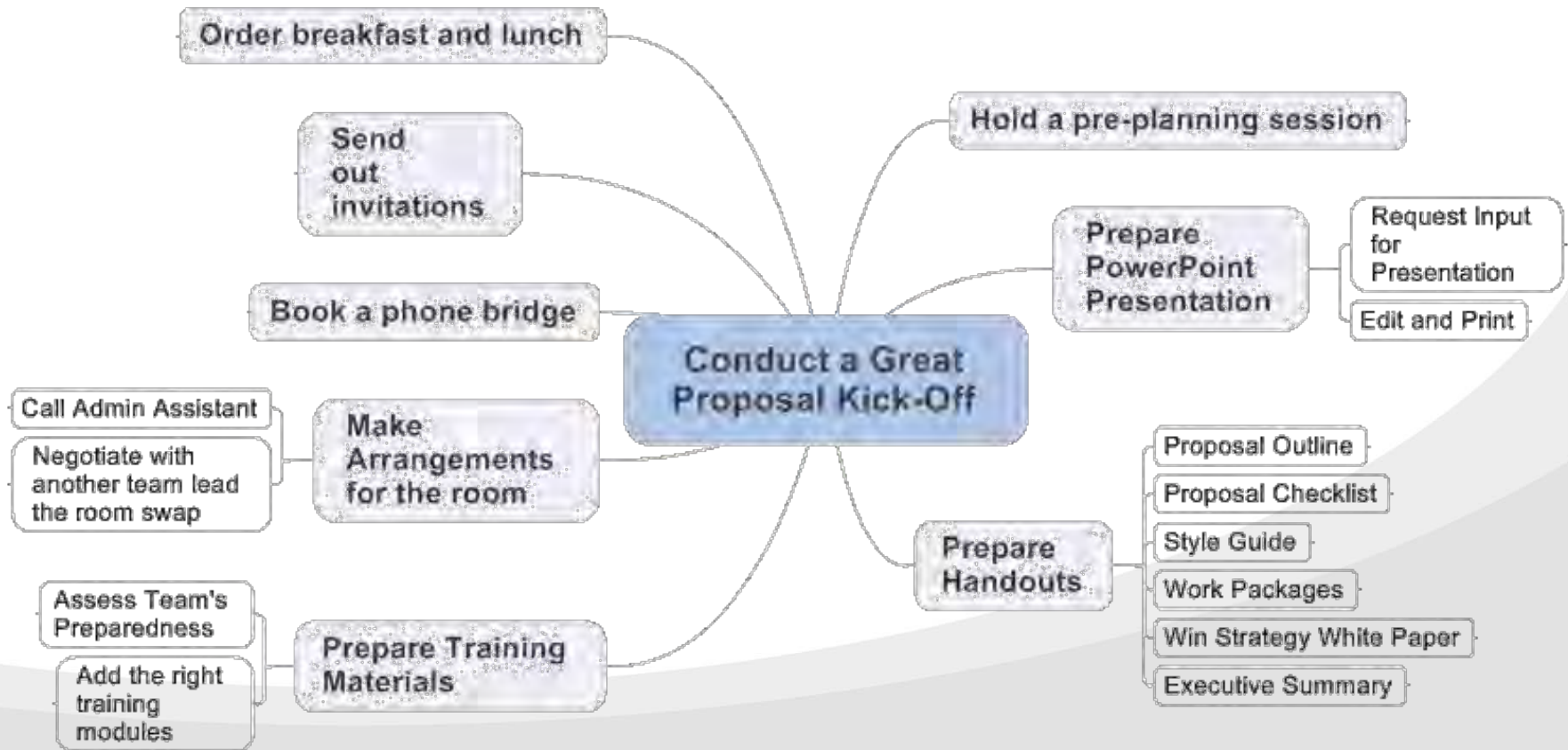**How:** Step-by-step approach with benefits to the customer and risk mitigation

When: In what sequence we are going to do it per schedule, or when have we done it before?

Where: Indicate the location or facility, or say where we have done it before successfully

Wow: Powerful section conclusion

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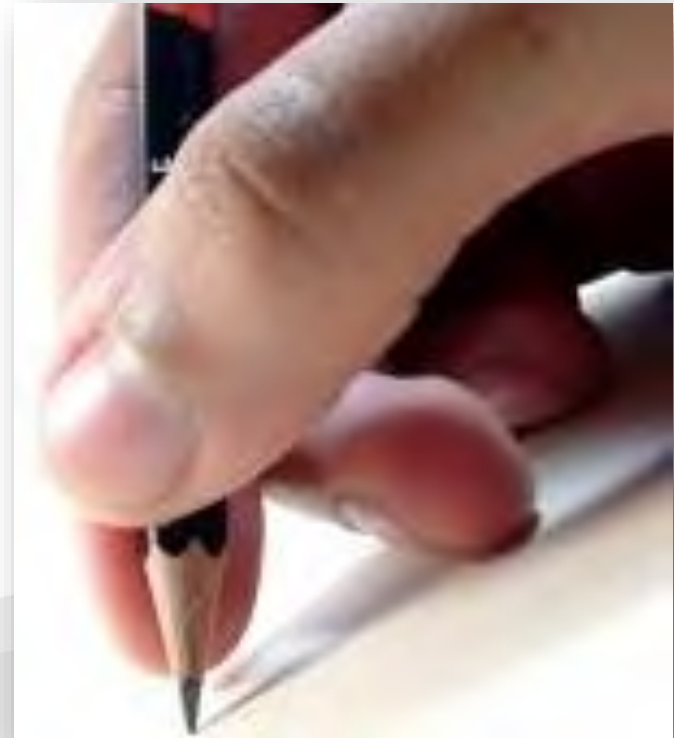
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Mind Mapping

Stage 2: Writing

- **Writing takes 20% of the time**

- **If not ready to write, go back to research**

- **Write as you would say it, say it out loud, say it simply**

- **DO NOT WRITE AND EDIT**
  - Cannot go back and correct until finishing the ENTIRE section
  - Type with your eyes closed or laptop screen bent back if tempted

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MAIN SECRET: Allow Yourself to Be Imperfect

The uglier the cake, the better!

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Tool: Dr. Wicked's 'Write or Die'

Write or Die

Putting the "Prod" in Productivity

- **Disable Backspace for increased evil!**

- **Full-screen Mode to shut out all distractions**

- **Disable save until goal reached to really crack the whip**

- **Always in front - why would you want to look at anything else?**

- **Gradual Grace Period Slider - for EXTREME SUBTLETY!**

- **Any Time Limit You Want! - how long can you hold up?**

http://writeordie.com

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The Art of Persuasion

Most proposals bore to tears, annoy through excessive bragging, or insult with a tutorial on something the customer already knows – but fail to persuade

- **Government is composed of individual people with different drivers**

- **Most people are emotional buyers**

- **Logic and credibility are there to justify the decision – to different degrees with different people and cultures**

- **Unconscious mind drives how evaluators respond to proposal content outside compliance**

- **Prestige, security, and career are at stake**

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Language That Kills Persuasion

Unfortunately, all of these "killers" are common in proposals

- **Most adjectives and adverbs (superlatives)**
  - "Premier"
  - "World class"
  - "Seasoned"
  - "Experienced"
- **"We understand…"**
- **Rounding off or approximating quantities**
- **Passive voice**
- **Impersonal language**

- **Lacking or spotty substance**
- **Too much technical jargon**
- **Generalizations and statements not backed by facts and details**
  - "A number of," "some", "many"
- **Philosophical ruminations**
- **"Very"**
- **"We propose"**
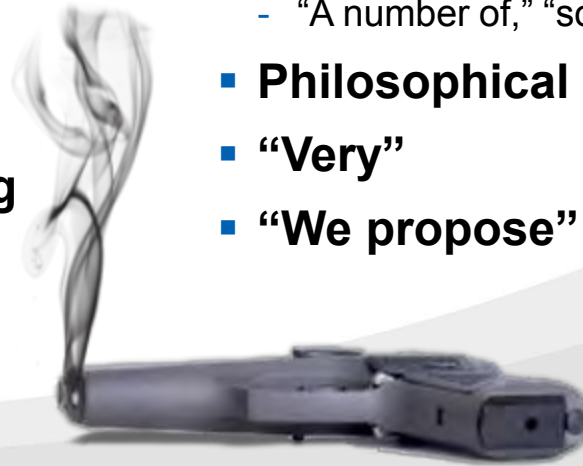
Persuasion is authenticity, authority, and passion that come from stating how your expertise will benefit the customer and citing the facts to prove it

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Elements of Persuasion in Proposal Text

- **Compelling content**

- **Correct structure**

- **Metaphor**

- **Story**

- **Language**

- **Readability**

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Stage 3: Rewriting, Restructuring, Editing, Polishing

- **Huge relief to the left-brainers**

- **Hardest type of editing: rewriting, restructuring, adding compliance-related topics and language**

- **Other editing can be automated: sentences, tenses, grammar, spelling...**

- **Can edit in any order**

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Readability and Editing Automation

- **Proposal should be readable at:**
  - 9th–10th grade level for management
  - 11th–12th grade level for technical

- **What this means is:**
  - Average 4-5 sentences per paragraph
  - Average 20 words per sentence
  - **Passive voice below 20%**
  - Flesch Reading Ease score 40-50 or higher

- **Tools: Microsoft Word, Atebion's Document Analyzer, VisibleThread, WordRake, and PerfectIt**

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