

Engineering and eloquence: Procedural, technical, and language aspects of grant-application development

Presenter: Dr Alan Crosier

Once a philosophy lecturer, now an independent research consultant – with interests in academic language, technical and rhetorical development of texts, and editing standards for the new online environments – Alan has worked on special research and teaching projects, and editing for successful publications and grant applications.

Overview

In our concern to get *strategies* right we risk neglecting *tactics*; but even the most politically astute and research-savvy funding pitch can fail when expression and presentation fall short. Do we give our academics enough support in grass-roots word processing, workflow, and process control, for the application effort? Do we check their drafts systematically enough for bad layout, inadequate signposting, opaque expression, poor grammar, or puzzling punctuation? This workshop starts from the premise that we often do not – and that the primary strategy should be to get such *tactics* sorted out. Together we review some major issues, sharing experiences through small-group exercises and whole-group discussion. In this hands-on workshop participants can expect to sharpen their own practical skills, toward working more effectively with the academic teams they assist.

Materials

Laptops are not needed, but do bring excerpts from grant applications – one or two pages, *in four copies*, for problem-solving in small groups. We will focus on the example of Aims and Background (subsection of C1, in ARC DP and DECRA applications); but parts of ROPE sections will be useful too, for consideration of techniques for uniform presentation, and also the A4 and A5 summaries. There will be handouts on selected technical matters.

Detailed schedule: Professional Development Workshop 6, Tuesday 18 September 2018

13:30 *Introductions*

Who we are, why we are here, what we will achieve together.

13:45 *The grant-application team: helping CIs to settle roles, workflow, and procedures*

Some starting discussion; then a small-group exercise in optimising the mechanics of the CI team's processes and communications. Orderly maintenance of a *master file*, timing issues, dealing with impasses, deciding details.

[*Outcomes:* Effective ways to help academics face the hard reality of coordinating a team's application.]

14:15 *Engineering 1: Word processing in a post-word-processing world*

We review our own Microsoft Word skills, then survey the range of approaches and competence levels of our academics. How to deal with disparities and inadequacies? Is there even a problem to address? How much can be done to address it, and is it worth our time to try?

[*Outcomes:* Insights into the place of word-processing skills. Ways to encourage improvement. Some handy tricks.]

15:00 *Afternoon tea*

15:30 *Engineering 2: Reliable formatting, harmonious layout*

A winning grant application is not just a linguistic text, but a visual communication with text, tables, diagrams, and graphical figures all laid out with clarity and the readers' needs firmly in mind. We discuss, pooling our expertise.

[*Outcomes:* Awareness of hidden pitfalls and possibilities in evolving the application.]

16:00 *Sealed section: Secret research professionals' business*

Details of this small-group activity are too sensitive to advertise! Let's just say we'll be sworn to preserve confidentiality and a sense of humour, as we share things our academics are really better off not knowing.

[*Outcomes:* Ways of overcoming impediments to our own greater effectiveness in the grant-application process.]

16:10 *Eloquence 1: Grammar, punctuation, and other "mechanical" language issues*

No application should be let down by jargon, obscure abbreviations, or inept punctuation and sentence structure. Even if the meaning does get through it's a really bad look – and every percentage improvement helps in the race for funding. Getting such things right is a *cheap* way to enhance an application. We look at techniques to achieve it.

[*Outcomes:* Appreciation of how certain language norms are changing in the internet age, and ways to respond.]

16:35 *Eloquence 2: The marriage of reason and rhetoric*

The research is a wonder to behold, and we have its details clearly specified, budgeted, illustrated, and laid out. Now we need to *sell* it. Participants already work to help their academics with this; now we compare notes, weigh priorities, and look at balancing techniques of persuasion drawn from the domains of reason and rhetoric.

[*Outcomes:* New ideas for polishing draft applications, giving them the best chance of success in tightened times.]

17:00 *Finish*