

Executive summary

The Ultimate Guide to Proposal Writing

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In our webinar, **“The Art Of Proposal Writing”**, we explored the biggest writing challenges facing proposal teams. And, with the help of:



We put together their learnings to help you write better proposals.

Prior to the webinar, we also surveyed the registrants on what they felt was the largest barrier to success. These were people working in Proposal writing roles. We asked them to rank these specific factors in order of importance:

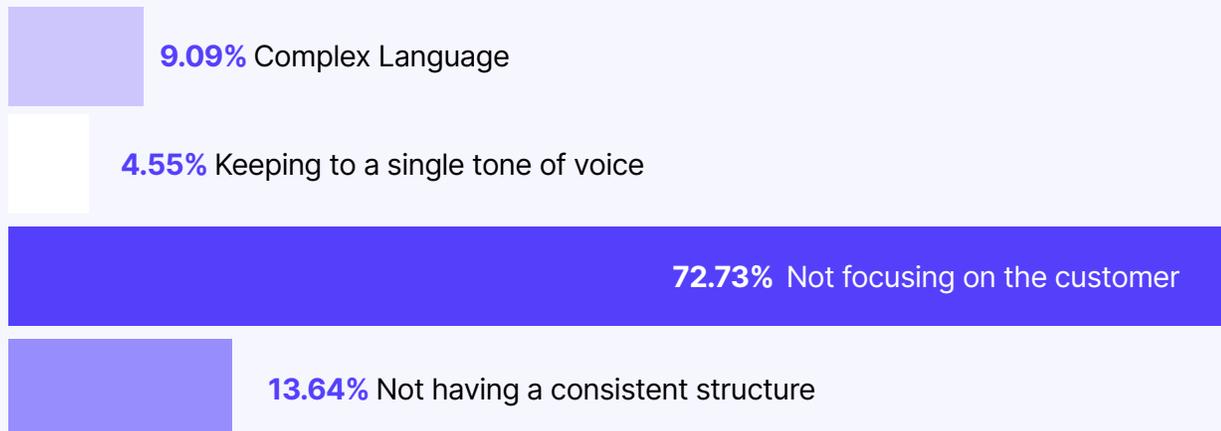
1. **Complex language**
2. **Not focusing on the customer**
3. **Keeping a single tone of voice**
4. **Not having a consistent structure**



From the data below you can see that ‘Not having a consistent structure’ came in second with 13.64% (3). Followed by ‘complex language’ with 9.09% (2). And finally, ‘keeping a single tone of voice’ with 4.55% (1 respondent).

Industry professionals have raised these 4 barriers with us time and time again. So, we wanted to address each in turn. And with the help of our panel of industry professionals, give you tips and best practices.

22 separate organizations completed the survey. 72.73% (16 respondents) said that the largest barrier was not focusing on the customer.





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Common Challenges





1. Speaking customer language

When reviewing proposals, identifying & mirroring customer phrasing and writing style can be one of the best ways to resonate with your customer. By doing so, you can create a response in a style that the customer is used to. This will avoid conflicting terms and will keep the language consistent throughout the proposal. We blogged on [mirroring](#) before, and this is one important aspect of this technique.



2. Being compelling

Being compelling is all about demonstrating the value of the partnership over the competition. This speaks to the human level of evaluating a proposal. Often it is the differentiator between proposals. To do this right, the proposal needs to be constructed from the customer's position. It should link their challenges back to how best you solve it, rather than leading with what you do, and using excessive boilerplate. The proposal needs to focus on why you are the best fit to solve the customer's specific problem. As opposed to focusing on what you do well.



3. Aligning tech contributors

When you have multiple people from different teams contributing to a proposal, writing may not be their primary focus. The challenge is being able to focus on compliance and addressing requirements in a direct and concise manner. And in a way that is easily digestible for valuers. Avoiding over complication is key here and making that message stick with the overall theme of the proposal.



4. Single tone of voice

A major struggle we see with our customers is crafting a single style which consistently supports an overall theme. Often, they need to deliver complex information in a concise and digestible way. Part of this challenge is the ability to incorporate industry and company style guides. The goal is that the effect of the overall proposal is greater than the sum of its parts. And for that to be the case the sections must deliver a cohesive message in a singular style.





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How do our panel of professionals do it?



Targeted focus with Anatalia Macik

Proposal / Bid Director
Security Enterprise Solutions
at Leidos

“You have to prioritize what the customer is looking for and tie it into your proposal. While still being compliant and keeping your language simple. It is the full story. This is why it is the art of proposal writing. It is an art and a science at the same time”

Anatalia's key tips:

Keep it simple

Use plain language. If customers or evaluators can't understand what we are writing. They are not going to be able to evaluate our solution. We want them to say "Yes, they are answering my questions and have the solution we want". After all the work and resources that were put into the proposal. We do not want to cause confusion and have them evaluate poorly. This point is critical. Keeping all that hard work and taking it down to simple sentences can mean the world to your business.

Focus on compliance

If you miss the mark on the compliance requirements your bid can get thrown out. You must focus on compliance, make sure that everything is compliant and answer every customer question. It is easy to make a mistake when trying to juggle a lot of bids at once. All your work could be wasted with something as simple as, we did not separate out all the CD's.

Prioritize your customer needs over your sales pitch

A lot of times we have our message we want to get across. And concentrate on what we want to talk about. But is that what your customer wants to hear? A lot of the time it is not about your sales pitch, it is about your customer needs. Tailor your sales pitch to your customer needs. When those areas line up, it is phenomenal. And you will have something that can truly win and create a great partnership.



Highlighting key areas with

Julia Desantis

Proposal and Technical Writer at
Noridian Healthcare Solutions

Here's what Julia suggests:

Using headings with a dash of messaging

Every proposal professional has been in a situation where you are an incumbent. And part of your win theme is emphasizing - we know what we are doing, there is no transition risk with us, and we will keep giving you the excellence you have come to expect. You can then connect this to a common heading in your instructions - Key Personnel. Using a colon here you can emphasize your messaging, for example:

Key Personnel: Ready to continue with excellence on Day 1 - For an incumbent

Key Personnel: Innovators from across the community - For an offering in a new market

Every page needs a visual clue indicating the most important point

A tactic I've seen is to create your compliant outline. But to use your headings to re-enforce some of the win themes. Once you have sat in with your capture team, listened to your solutioning team, and created great win themes. Look at your response and identify any opportunities to tuck some of that messaging into headings.





Methods / tools with

Ginny Carson

Vice President – Proposal and Capture at Chickasaw Nation Industries

“It occurs to me that we can’t do any of these complex things. Like keeping it simple and focusing on compliance, unless we have a stable toolbox. This is the artist’s palette.”

Ginny has these suggestions:

Style guide

Create, follow, and improve a consistent style guide across all proposals. We deployed a consistent style guide across all our proposals. It does not mean we do not deviate from it. But we deviate from it with intention and purpose based on the specific requirements.

Style sheets

Resulting from the consistent style guide we can create and follow a singular style sheet for individual proposals. When you have a specific proposal and a diverse set of writers you can provide a style sheet. This style sheet is anchored back to the fundamental style guide that goes across everything we create. And it has been specifically tailored for this bid. This will have all contributors working in the same style which saves the proposal manager a lot of time.

Standard template

Create a template as a starting point for all responses. This is an easy grab and go containing all the formatting needed to start a response. Creating this can take a bit of time and work across the team. But is worth doing and keeps our thoughts on the more important and higher level aspects.

Create, use, and update content for oft-repeated information

For certain things you are often citing. Make it easy on yourself and have a standard that you reach to.



Criteria/Evaluation with

Amy McGeady

Senior Vice President, Strategic Services at Shipley Associates

Here’s Amy’s tips:

Focus on the 4 c’s

be compliant, be compelling, clear and be concise. The thing about being clear is you can be very direct using the simplest language that we can. Write in active voice, be well organized and be concise. We work with Subject Matter Experts who give us a lot of information, but sometimes less is more. The more we can present an idea clearly, the easier it is for a busy evaluator.

Place your most important messages first

Readers may be familiar with the military term called BLUF, Bottom Line Up Front. Others know the vernacular ‘Too long, didn’t read’. Make your main point first. We do not want our readers to hunt for what we are trying to say and risk losing them.

Organize the proposal for ease of evaluation

Organize while keeping evaluation in mind. Make sure the proposal is scannable. Make sure the headings contain the important information for easy scanning. Organize to the bid request. Use their numbering, their labelling, headings, summaries, and lists. Call attention to your main points.

Focus on measurable and tangible benefits

Be explicit about what is in it for them.





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How can VT Writer help?

VT Writer can help improve your proposal writing process. Here's how 2 organizations made significant savings, and quality improvements after adopting VT Writer.

\$50 - 100K

Airbus saves between \$50k – 100k per bid in the final proofreading stage of proposal responses.

AIRBUS

AIRBUS is the European leader in the Defense and Space sector. Their diverse product portfolio ranges from aircrafts to cyberspace.

Context: AIRBUS underwent a Digital Transformation Program. The goal of this program was to improve quality, efficiency, and teamwork company wide.

20 down to 12

Pragmatics introduced readability grade level scoring into their process. Using the Readability Reports, documents went from a grade level of 20 down to 12 or lower. Making them easier to understand.

The logo for Pragmatics, featuring a stylized blue 'P' icon with a circular arrow and the word 'pragmatics' in a lowercase, sans-serif font.

Pragmatics, Inc is a leading Cloud, Development, Security & Operations (DevSecOps) and Data solutions provider.

Context: Pragmatics were looking for a more streamlined way to bid on pursuits. They needed to improve the use of their time to make better bid decisions.





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Our proposal writing checklist

Proposal writing is both an art and a science. There are many aspects we need to keep in mind. To help you, we have put together a checklist that you can refer to when writing your proposals.



1. Keep to a consistent template

Use templates to support a single tone of voice, coherence, and efficiency. Understanding what the structure is going to look like and making something that is repeatable. Not only in a specific proposal but things you can re-use in additional proposals.



2. Check for troublesome words and definitions

Create watchword lists to support your writers. Creating your own style guide with key terms, references, and key themes, so that everyone is writing the same way. This results in a much more cohesive proposal.



3. Use data to lead your proposal

Identifying patterns and key terminology within customer documents. Understanding consistencies will allow you to address underlying pain points and effectively communicate your value proposition.



4. Make sure you are answering the reviewer's requirements

Craft a cohesive message in a consistent tone. By using dictionaries and watch word lists, you can shape the style of contributors. And control the level of complexity.



5. Check for a single tone of voice

The proposal needs to be easy to follow, needs to be clear and cohesive. Your message should be clear, concise and customer centric. Think of the customer and speak to their "why". The value that you are going to bring to the partnership. And why you are the correct person to partner with.



Proposal writing has many layers to it. And there are many challenges.

These best practices and tips will help you with your next proposal. Using our checklist will have your team working on a cohesive, clear, and customer-focused reply. Like a book that has been written by one author.

VT Writer can help with many of the challenges and best practices mentioned by the professionals. With objective metrics and the ability to score every paragraph for clarity, readability, and grade level.

Overcoming these barriers and equipping your teams with the right tools to solve these challenges allows you stay ahead of the game and win more. Leading global companies are using VT Writer in their proposal writing processes. You should consider it too.

Here's an example of how AIRBUS benefits from VisibleThread in their Program Mgmt., Commercial Contracts, Legal, Engineering, Bid & Quality teams.

AIRBUS

Benefits from using VisibleThread

- ✓ Millions of \$ in savings
- ✓ Time savings of 480h per month
- ✓ Risk Mitigation
- ✓ Improved Compliance
- ✓ Improve Quality
- ✓ Single tone of voice

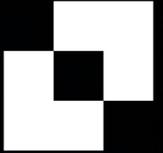
“Airbus saves between \$50k - \$100k per bid in the final proofreading stage of Proposal Responses.”



André Zobolski,
Head of Commercial & Contracts for Space Systems
[AIRBUS Defence & Space](#)

[Read the Case Study](#)





Talk to us by mailing info@VisibleThread.com to find out how you use VT Writer in your proposal writing process.

To learn more about VT Writer you can join us for a live demonstration.

Live demo

