Proposal Writing Series

Sustaining Your Argument

Research & Innovation Office
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER
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Proposal Editor & Writing Coach

• Supports AB Nexus (Anschutz-Boulder collaborations)
• Focus on NIH & Biosciences proposals on CU Boulder campus
• Works with all bioscience associated departments across campus (including NIH proposals coming out of CEAS) on multi-disciplinary proposals
• Helps individual investigator & small teams proposals, as available
• Focus on stylistic, structural, substantive, and revision editing of research proposals from the prospective of an educated, non-SME reviewer
Agenda

• Purpose and Expectations

Session Topics

- Proposal Writing as Story Telling
- Nested Arcs
- Paragraph Cohesion
- Topic and Thematic Strings
- Issue, Discussion, Point
- Problem Paragraphs
- Section and Sub-Section Headings
- Planning Before Drafting
Storytelling

• Proposal tells a story

• Keeping Readers Engaged:
  ✓ What is being talked about?
  ✓ What is going on with the subject?
  ✓ How did things end?

• Macro (proposal whole) and Micro (sections, paragraphs, sentences)
Figure 10.1. A story arc.

Figure 10.2. A story is a set of nested arcs.

Figure 10.3. Complete versus broken story arcs: beginnings and endings are power positions.

Writing Science (Schimel), pp.96-97
Sentence Structure

OCAR

- **O** Opening: who is the story about? = Subject
- **C/A** Challenge/action: what happened = Verb
- **R** Resolution: what was its outcome? = Object

Topic Strings and Stress Placement

- The stress placement is typically at the end of a sentence or before a semi-colon.
- Readers interpret words in the end place position as carrying more importance.

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The Structure of Scientific Writing – George Gopen and Judith Swan, Writing Science – Josh Schimel
Paragraph Cohesion

Principles of Paragraph Cohesion

• A cohesive paragraph has consistent *topic strings*

• A cohesive paragraph has *thematic strings*

• A cohesive paragraph introduces new topic and thematic strings in a predictable location: at the end of the sentence(s) that introduce the paragraph

• A coherent paragraph will usually have a single sentence that articulates its point

• A coherent paragraph will typically locate that point sentence in one of two places
  ✓ End of its *issue*
  ✓ End of its *discussion*
Topic and Thematic Strings

Topic Strings

• “Sets” of conceptually related words that run through a paragraph

• Words in topic strings and words in thematic strings are not mutually exclusive

Thematic Strings

• “Sets” of conceptually related words that run through a paragraph

• Words in topic strings and words in thematic strings are not mutually exclusive

Thematic Strings Gone Bad

• Too few strings

• Diffuse strings
Molecules are comprised of covalently bonded atoms. Molecules' reactions are controlled by the strength of the bonds. Molecules, however, sometimes react slower than bond strength would predict.

Molecules are comprised of covalently bonded atoms. Bond strength controls a molecule's reactions. Sometimes however, those reactions are slower than bond strength would predict.
Paragraph can be divided into two sections

- **Issue** – short opening segment that introduces the concept(s) the writer wants to discuss.

- **Discussion** – explanation, elaboration, support, argument for the issue

“The issue promises; the discussion delivers.”

**Point** – the sentence which makes a new claim or “point” about the issue that logically flows from the discussion

- End of the issue

- End of the discussion (paragraph or section)

- Must be articulated clearly
Molecules are comprised of covalently bonded atoms. Bond strength controls a molecule's reactions. Sometimes however, those reactions are slower than bond strength would predict.

Sometimes molecular reaction is slower than bond strength would predict. Molecules are comprised of covalently bonded atoms. The strength of covalently bonded atoms is measured by the energy required to “break” or separate the bonded atom (activation energy). There is one factor which can increase activation energy and slow down molecular reaction. When a reaction is to take place between reactants in two different physical states, activation energy is increased, and molecular reaction slowed, if we increase the surface area of the more-condensed reactant.
Problem Paragraphs

Diagnosis

• At the end of an issue, did you introduce a concept that \textit{could} be taken as a theme, but then you fail to develop the concept in the discussion?

• Did you fail to include in the issue important themes that you develop in the discussion?

• Did you introduce a concept that promises a theme only to use various/unfamiliar key terms/words which prevent the reader from connecting them to the theme?

• Did you fail to place the thematic elements of the issue in the stress position?

• Did you make too many promises to the reader by having more than one thematic string?
Problem Paragraphs

Treatment

• Review the discussion independently of the issue and revise the issue to include the thematic strings/concepts which actually occur

• Develop the thematic strings/concepts which you framed in the issue but did not include in the discussion

• Delete from the issue whatever you don’t want to develop in the discussion
Section, Sub-section, Title

Headings

- Structure the document
- Signal the end of one issue and the beginning of another
- Informed by the key topics/themes/points

Title

- “Super” Heading
- Straightforward
- Incorporate key themes/topics
Figure 10.2. A story is a set of nested arcs.
Planning before Drafting

- List a few central concepts you think will run through the research project.
- Place these concepts in any relevant, required proposal section.
- Create clusters of subordinate concepts for each identified central concept.
- The words for the central and subordinate concepts will provide key thematic strings.
- Develop one cohesive, synopsis paragraph for each required proposal section.
- Combine the synopses and evaluate for overall coherence – does it coherently tell the story you want?
RIO Grant Writing Series

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Research & Innovation Office – Request Proposal Support