

ThinkSCIENCE Tip Sheet: Writing Effective Grant Proposals

1 Tell a story

Every story has a beginning, middle, and end, and so should your grant proposal. In the beginning, give the background to your research and describe the problem you hope to solve. In the middle, describe specifically how you will accomplish your goals and how the funding will let you do this. In the end, explain how you will evaluate your results and highlight the significance of the proposed work.

2 Don't use too many ifs

Sometimes grant writers will strive for modesty by frequently using phrases like “If we are awarded the grant...” and “If this grant application is accepted...” This is not necessary because such conditions are implicitly understood. Instead, write confidently as if you expect to be awarded the grant. However, do specifically mention the effect the funding will have. For example, you could write “Part of the grant will be used to hire a laboratory manager,” rather than “If we were awarded the grant, one possible use of the funds would be to hire a laboratory manager.”

3 Follow the instructions

Be sure to follow the instructions exactly. Adhere to word limits. Meet the deadlines. If you are sending your proposal electronically, be sure to follow any technical specifications such as file format and file size. Fill in all the blanks, and answer all the questions. Be sure to include any requested institutional approvals. If you fail to follow the instructions, there's a chance the application will be rejected unread.

4 Be concise, specific, and complete

Each year MEXT and JSPS receive thousands of grant applications, and the reviewers who screen and assess the applications will certainly be busy. Don't burden the reviewer with excessive length, and don't submit extra documents that are not requested in the instructions. That said, you should strive to be specific and complete. You will need to provide specific details about your budget and about how you will go about implementing your research proposal.

5 Set clear, measurable goals

Clearly describe the expected outcomes of your research and how you will assess them. Research with clear, measurable goals will have an advantage because the funder will be able to easily see that the funds have been well spent. If you are submitting a grant renewal, briefly discuss your prior attainment of goals.

6 Customize your proposal to the funder

What are the funder's research priorities? Explain how your research will contribute to the funding organization's overall goals.

7 Include specific expense types

Mention specific types of expenses that you will use the funding to pay. Otherwise, you might find that your grant doesn't allow you to pay for reasonable expenses, such as editing/translation, article processing charges and/or page fees, and travel to conferences.

8 Write for a broad audience

Your application will be screened and reviewed by various people, not all of whom will be experts in your specific area of research. Of course, you will need to include technical details in some parts, but in other parts—especially the summary, introduction, and conclusion—the content should be understandable to any educated reader, not just experts in your field.