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How to Write Winning Proposals

The 7 Key Elements of Persuasive Business Presentations

by Michael J. Dowling

About the Author

Michael J. Dowling helps thought leaders and other professionals write and publish non-fiction books to accomplish their goals and advance their careers.

If you're a business owner, entrepreneur, or manager at any level, you need to know how to persuasively present your views in writing.

Even if your job doesn't require formal proposals, you almost certainly must write letters, e-mails, and memos to persuade others to accept your ideas, commit to your causes, fund your projects, or use your services.

This article presents some of the key elements of a persuasive presentation. The elements are essentially the same for all types of communications, so I will use the generic term *proposal* to encompass them all.

For more detailed guidance about proposal writing, I recommend reading *Persuasive Business Proposals: Writing to Win More Customers, Clients, and Contracts* by Tom Sant.

7 Elements of a Persuasive Presentation

In order to persuade others to take the actions you recommend, you must engage both their minds and their emotions. You need to present information that is understandable, accurate, thoughtful, and engaging.

Although the exact format of your presentations will vary, I believe you will find it helpful to keep in mind the seven steps outlined below. For shorter proposals, such as letters, memos, and e-mails, you may choose to abbreviate or skip some of these steps.



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Step #1: Establish rapport.

Briefly state your reason for writing. Did someone refer you? Are you responding to a request or invitation? Whatever your reason, get to the point without fawning.

If you skip this step and launch right into your recommendation, readers of your proposal may feel skeptical and defensive.

Step #2: Clearly state the problem.

Readers of your proposal will be more receptive to your ideas when they know that you have understood their concerns. Demonstrate empathy by clearly stating their difficulty, need, issue, or point of view.

If you skip this step and launch right into your recommendation, readers of your proposal may feel skeptical and defensive. They will get the impression that your agenda is more important than theirs.

Summarize the financial costs and other negative consequences of their issue or problem. Start with what they have told you, and add any additional insights that come to mind. Paint a realistic picture and create a sense of urgency. After reading this section of your proposal, you want your readers to say, "This is painful to read, but it's right on target. We need to do something now!"

Step #3: Summarize the desired outcomes.

List the goals your audience wants to achieve. Make it clear that *your* goal is to help them accomplish *their* goals.

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Step #4: Highlight alternative solutions.

Briefly describe any alternative solutions that are being considered or that come to your mind, and state the shortcomings of each. People will be better able to focus on your proposed solution if you first help them close their minds to the other options. They will have more confidence in your recommendation if they know you've considered various courses of action.

Step #5: Recommend your solution.

Now that you have stated the problem and ruled out alternative solutions, it's time to present your recommendation. State precisely how your idea, service, or product will solve their problem and help them attain their goals. Use positive language: "I am confident that within X months you will see ..."

Clearly ask for the order, the meeting, or whatever else you want. State how you will follow up.

Step #6: Back up your claims.

Demonstrate that you can deliver what you have promised. Cite case studies, testimonials, and supporting data from other sources. Provide information about your company's staff, management philosophy, guarantees, and past successes.

Step #7: Ask for agreement.

Clearly ask for the order, the meeting, or whatever else you want. State how you will follow up. For example, "I will call you in a few days to schedule an appointment," or "Please sign the enclosed contract and return it to me."

Close warmly, but professionally. Don't thank people for reading your proposal. Make it good, and they'll thank you!

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About the Author

Michael J. Dowling is an award-winning ghostwriter and publisher of non-fiction books for business executives and other thought leaders. His turnkey services make the writing and publishing process understandable, cost-effective, time-efficient, and enjoyable for his clients.



Mike earned an MBA degree from Columbia Business School, where he was a Harriman Scholar, and a Bachelor of Science degree with honors from the University of Florida. Prior to founding Wool Street Publishing in 1999, he served as president of an educational publishing company, president of a national gift company, and administrator of a 1000-member church. He is the ghostwriter, author, or editor of numerous books and articles.

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