



Writing to Win

Resource

CORTAC Group



[Improve Your Proposal Writing And Achieve Higher Evaluation Scores.](#)

Understanding that proposals are partitioned and scored and not read like a book from cover to cover is a key element to making sure your proposal is evaluator friendly and structured to score high. We discuss five simple steps below that will dramatically improve your proposal evaluation and writing skills.

[Follow the instructions but write to the specified evaluation criteria.](#)

Write to the evaluation criteria. The Request For Proposal (RFP) provides instructions on what the customer wants you to discuss, but the problem is that just writing to the instructions does not win, it merely makes your proposal compliant with the instructions. Evaluators are required to use separately defined evaluation criteria to score a proposal and determine the winning offer. In some cases the evaluation criteria and instructions on what they ask you to address are not aligned. The Evaluators must use the RFP's defined criteria to score your response in accordance with the evaluation criteria, identifying strengths, weakness, and if it meets the expectations. Writing to the evaluators so it is easy for them to assess and score your offer is a key part of being a good proposal writer.

Decompose the evaluation sentence into three parts. Decomposing the evaluation sentences into three components (Action, Object, and Criteria) helps authors to focus their writing so that it is easy for evaluators to find your response to the criteria and score it to the RFP instructions. To help you understand this, we walk through the elements that evaluators must perform to comply with their evaluation obligations. The evaluator must implement an action (e.g. Evaluate, assess, determine ability) on an Object (e.g. Design, approach, process) and assess to see if it meets the Criteria they defined (e.g. Requirements, SOW completion, understanding).

Example: The Government will assess the quality of the proposed solution, its adherence to sound engineering principles, and the degree to which the implemented solution will achieve the SOO.

- Action: "Assess"
- Objects: "Proposed Solution, Implement solution"
- Criteria: "Quality, Adherence to sound engineering principles, degree it will achieve the SOO"

In order for the evaluator to complete their evaluation they need to find the object. If the evaluator cannot find the object in your proposal, then they cannot complete the evaluation which could result in a poor score. Good proposal writing "hand-holds" the evaluator to the specific location for them to complete their task by using the exact same "object" terminology used in the RFP. Thus, decomposing the evaluation sentence helps to ensure

we understand and focus our response to make sure the author is addressing the object and making it easy for the evaluator to find.

If the evaluation uses similar but different words for “Objects” you need to speak to each. To do this, establish a structure / order in your response that addresses each object individually. For example, the RFP could use similar terminology such as (proposed solution and implemented solution). You should define an approach to both – the proposed solution could be a high-level architecture that is linked to the customer’s overall mission objectives, while the implemented solution could be the specific elements that make up your architecture. As you review your writing/text, make sure you can find the evaluation “object” and determine if your response to the criteria provides a clear conclusion that you expect the evaluator to make.

Structure out of Chaos. Providing a structured response to any question demonstrates understanding. If the RFP asks you to explain how you assessed something, describing how you assessed using a set of derived criteria demonstrates your rational thinking. This makes it easier for the evaluator to follow your train of thought. It also answers their question right up front and the rest is just explanation. This is especially true when the RFP instructions and criteria appear to be a mess of random thoughts. You sort this into a structured approach, provide the roadmap and then answer the subsequent random questions using your roadmap, once again demonstrating your understanding of the problem. This also applies to answering similar RFP questions in a similar fashion.

[Write to the customer’s perspective by articulating the benefits first and establish metrics to quantify the benefit.](#)

Think “Why”. Authors often have a hard time understanding the difference between features and benefits. This is primarily due to authors being too familiar with the technology or approach they are using. Consequently, they have come to believe the feature is a synonym for the benefit they are proposing. (e.g. some people may not understand why the 500 horse power feature in your car is good for them). Benefits are what motivates a buyer to buy and they typically come in one of six categories: Cost, Schedule, Increased effectiveness to mission objective (e.g. faster, safer), Risk, Quality, and Ease of Use. (A 500HP car allows you to accelerate around a drunk driver and leave them behind in less than 1 second when traveling at 60 mph, improving your safety).

Features are the justification on why the benefit is good for the customer. A good test to use when you are writing is to see if you answered the question (why) and test to see if it ties back to one of the six benefit categories.

Establish benefit metrics. A key element to improving your scoring associated with a benefit is to establish a metric or measurement that quantifies the value of the benefit (e.g. 20% cost savings, 30% reduced number of operations required). Quantifying the benefit can be

challenging and often requires some creative analysis, but if done properly, sets the framework for a clear demarcation between you and other competitors that is easy to score and support during the evaluation process.

Eliminate adjectives. Another important writing step is to make sure your benefit scores high by selling why your benefit is credible. To achieve this, you need to include facts and data that support the benefit/feature claim. Using adjectives in a proposal like (e.g. best, very) leads evaluators to be guarded and pessimistic about the claims in the proposal. The fewer the adjectives and the more data rich a proposal is, the more credible it is.

[Make it easy to find Strengths and Risk Reducers.](#)

Use Tables and bold or italicized text on strengths. The customer scores your proposal using strengths, risk reducers, and weaknesses and then tallies these up to develop an overall rating/score of your proposal. Drafting your response so that it is easy for an evaluator to find strengths and risk reducers helps them perform a quick evaluation and mitigates the risk of them missing the elements of your offer that you believe support a high evaluation score. The strength statements should be succinct and contain both the features and benefit of your offer. These statements often require multiple iterations and reviews with other team members to mature them so that they are succinct and clear.

[Use the customer's language to support the evaluators search tools and minimize the thinking and guess work of the evaluator.](#)

Language Friendly. The customer is looking to score your proposal and is searching for key words to do their assessment. Using similar but different words leads to either missed searches or ambiguity on what your proposal is speaking to versus what the customer wanted.

Search Friendly. Work with the desktop production and graphics folks to make sure that the entire proposal is searchable, especially if you plan on submitting PDF files. We put a lot of information in graphics but if the incorrect settings are used anywhere in the development process, those words will not be recognized by a search routine in Acrobat Reader.

[Minimize introductions and conclusions and sequence the topics as specified by the RFP.](#)

Get to the point. In school we are taught to draft introductions and summaries and provide conclusions. However, evaluators are working through multiple proposals and just want to get to the point so they can score it quickly. Long introductions tend to provide material that is not tuned to the criteria they are trying to score against, which can lead to frustrated evaluators because they have to read more than what they needed to. In addition, once the

evaluator finds the material to create the score they don't go look for a conclusion to complete their assignment.

Make it easy to find. During the evaluation processes the evaluators typically partition the proposal into sub-sections and assign the sub-sections to different evaluators. Thus, following the proposal instructions and placing the information specifically in the sequence and location dictated by the RFP helps to ensure your response to the instructions will be found by the evaluator.

About CORTAC Group: CORTAC was founded to foster and promote a team environment with leaders that have proven success. We provide training, project management, and proposal management resources and tailor our approach to best meet your business needs. Our experience allows us to quickly integrate with your team and help you achieve your goals. As part of our Proposal Development Services we provide Capture Management, Proposal Management, Volume lead Management, and Price To Win capabilities. We work with your proposal team using a disciplined development process that is tailored to be compliant with your processes and needs.