

Writing Skills and Presentations

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Professional writing

- Good Proposals are professionally written
- Professional writing is about action
- Its about change
- Its about getting results
- Making something happen
- Its not about “informing” or “sharing”

- Professional writing skills are acquired through practice (do it yourself principle)

Review of proposals

- Reviewers of research proposals, whether they are faculty, funding sponsors, or peer reviewers,
 - want a clear idea of what the researcher plans to do,
 - how and when various tasks are to be accomplished.
 - Whether the researcher is capable of successfully following the proposed plan of action.

What do reviewers look at in proposals?

1. Is the title of the proposal appropriate and clear?
2. Have the procedures been presented in enough detail to enable a reader to duplicate them?
3. Do you find any content repeated or duplicated?
A common fault is repetition in the text of data in tables or figures.

Key aspects that reviewers check for

1. Significance of the proposed research
2. Specific objectives to be achieved
3. Variables to be measured
4. Researchability
5. Feasibility in terms of time available, budget, subject availability, Facilities, and equipment, researcher experience)
6. Ethical considerations

Approaches to professional writing

- You are the expert
- You have the first-hand knowledge to the situation
- You know more than the reader
- You are the one who has collected and analyzed the data
- Your understanding of the situation matters

Responsibilities of the proposal writer

1. **Investigate the situation** using a range of tools and points of view.
2. **Analyze** – understand the causes of the problem to be solved.
3. **Describe and explain** – help your donor/examiner/supervisor to see the situation the way you see it.
4. **Develop a plan of action** – set objectives, devise strategy, schedule activities, develop a monitoring and evaluation mechanism and management plan.

Rule of thumb in proposal writing

Persuade your reader that:

- There is a problem
- The problem is worth solving
- It can be solved
- You can do it

Problem statement is the most critical part of the proposal.

Most people look at this before anything else.

Proposal format - Title Page

- **Title** (not more than 20 words).
- **Authors**-full name followed by the highest qualification in brackets (e.g. B.Sc., BED, and M.Sc).
- **Registration number** below the name.
- **Signature and date** below registration number.
- Department name below the signature line.
- A statement below department about the degree being fulfilled (e.g. **“A research proposal submitted for the degree of Master in Science in the School of Pure and Applied Sciences of Embu University College**)
- **Supervisors (at least two)** beginning with the main university supervisor, listed by title, signature and date. Below each supervisor

Abstract

- Abstract is a brief overview of the proposal
- Should not exceed 500 words for proposals submitted to SPAS.
- The abstract should contain
 - Background to the study (2-3 sentences)
 - Problem statement/aim of the study
 - Study objectives
 - Summary of methods
 - Data analysis
 - Study significance

Acronyms/abbreviations

- Explain meaning of abbreviations (e.g. AIDS, WHO, HIV), and acronyms (such as child, adolescents etc.)
- Don't abbreviate everything, apply only to internationally accepted abbreviations

Introduction

- **Background** - In this section, you need to show how your intended research builds on what has already been done in the area.
- **Problem statement** -The problem should be stated in such a way that its importance is apparent to the reviewer
- **Research questions**
- **Research hypothesis**
- **Research objectives**
- **Justification (or significance) of the problem**

Review of literature

- This involves identifying and searching for information on a topic and developing a comprehensive picture of the state of knowledge on that topic.
- The breadth and depth of the literature review will depend on your knowledge, the level of study and purpose

Methods

Should be thorough covering the following.

- The research design?
- The sampling plan, instrumentation, specific procedures and analytic strategies.
- Data collection methods

References

- All books and articles cited in your proposal must be listed alphabetically according to the author's name, the same way they are cited in the text.
- Additional lines after the first, should be indented at least three spaces from the margin of the first line

Point to remember

Whenever you write, you are writing for action

Hence, the following aspects are critical as they contribute to the results

- **how you organize your writing,**
- **how clear your ideas are,**
- **The language you use,**
- **Your style,**
- **And correctness of your writing**

Common problems with proposal writing

1. Lack of clear objectives
2. Poorly-organized and difficult to follow
3. Lack of conciseness
4. Lack of clarity
5. Poor use of language
6. Poor style
7. Poor spelling, grammar and punctuation

1. Lack of clear objectives

Proposal must be 100% clear

- Avoid providing too much information, most of which will most likely be irrelevant and unnecessary – makes reading extremely boring
- Have a clear progression of ideas
- Let there be clear distinction between major and minor ideas
- Avoid to be seen as confused, with no clear purpose in mind
- Let your objectives be SMART

2. Poorly-organized and difficult to follow

a) Write effective paragraphs

- A paragraph should only expound on one idea. If you have two important things to say, write two paragraphs.
- A paragraph should not be deeper than your page width.
- Paragraphs must connect with one another
- All paragraphs must start with their conclusion
- The supporting data/explanations should come after the main point.

Rule of Thumb

- Conclusions come BEFORE evidence.
- Use the **inverted pyramid format**
- First sentence of each paragraph sums up or concludes from the data.
- Then follow in decreasing order of importance or go from general to specific
- The first sentence is called the TOPIC SENTENCE

b) Writing effective topic sentences

Examples

- There are various causes for under-employment in urban areas.
- The non-formal education programme has had the following results.
- There are three main reasons for the high rate of HIV infection in the county.
- Mediation has led to three important results.

Task

Read the following passages and write an appropriate topic sentence

Mpeketoni District can be reached by driving 14 hours in a four-wheel drive vehicle from the capital city of Kenya. **The winding road passes through dense forests and is prone to banditry attacks.** Many parts of the district can only be reached on foot. **Daily life in Mpeketoni is a challenge for the people, most of whom are farmers.** Access to education and social services is lower in Mpeketoni than in other parts of Kenya.

Suggested solution

- The text has two ideas, which is against the rules of paragraphing
- and
-

Two ideas in the text

1. Location, which we conclude is remote; and
2. The other describes the status of social services

Possible topic sentence

Mpeketoni is one of the most remote and undeserved parts of Kenya. Mpeketoni District can be reached by driving 14 hours in a four-wheel drive vehicle from the capital city of Kenya.

The winding road passes through dense forests and is prone to banditry attacks.

Many parts of the district can only be reached on foot. Daily life in Mpeketoni is a challenge for the people, most of whom are farmers. Access to education and social services is lower in Mpeketoni than in other parts of Kenya.

3. Lack of conciseness

- To be concise, avoid too much irrelevant information
- Avoid unnecessary details
- Proposal should not be too long (masters= 15 pages less references and appendices; PhD = 21 pages)
- If too long, then it takes too long to say anything and important ideas are lost
- Avoid causing fatigue to the reader.

4. Lack of clarity

- Avoid long sentences – sentences should be short (average 15 words) so as not strain the reader.
- Use shorter, more **familiar words** wherever possible (avoid words such as flabbergasting, debilitating)
- Avoid writing to show off your vocabulary pushing your reader to look for a dictionary

4. Lack of clarity cont.....

- Do not use too much linkers such as together with; as well as, etc. as this makes our sentences less clear and reduce our readers ability to follow our message
- Long words and long sentences destroy your readers concentration

How to reduce long sentences

1. Reduce unnecessary words

Example 1

- The meeting between community leaders and project staff **afforded** us **an opportunity** to share perspectives on progress.

Edited

- The meeting between community leaders and project staff allowed us to share perspectives on progress.

Example 2

- As a consequence of the awareness raising activities in the district, the number of girls enrolled at primary level has almost doubled.

- **Edited**

Because of (or Due to) awareness raising activities in the district, the number of girls enrolled at primary level has almost doubled

Task- Edit the following sentences

1. It is compulsory to follow the application guidelines carefully.

Answer: You must follow the application guidelines carefully.

2. Despite the fact that there was a delay in starting the project, all activities were carried out on time.

Answer: Although there was a delay in starting the project, all activities were carried out on time.

Task 3

3. Frequent disputes over land **in conjunction with** lack of any trained mediators have contributed to social unrest.

Answer: Frequent disputes over land and lack of any trained mediators have contributed to social unrest.

II. Get Rid of meaningless phrases

Some phrases commonly used in writing are nothing but hot air.

Example: I would like to take this early opportunity to thank you for your continued support in my project activities.

Edited: Thank you for your continued support.

Not necessary to go round. After all you are saying a positive thing.

Task – Strike out the unneeded phrases

1. As far as we are concerned, there is no need for any major changes at this point.

Answer: There is no need for any major changes at this point.

2. I am of the opinion that Forest User Groups have made an enormous contribution to raising the living standards of the poorest members of the community.

Answer: Forest User Groups have made an enormous contribution to raising the living standards of the poorest members of the community.

Task contin.....

3. I would like to say that there is a strong need for more transparency at community level on how decisions are reached centrally.

Answer: There is a strong need for more transparency at community level on how decisions are reached centrally.

5. Poor use of language

- Choose words appropriate to your reader
- Use simple, modern and brief words wherever possible
- Use English NOT mother tongue
- Avoid creating acronyms as this makes reading hard work e.g. Embu Agricultural Show (EAS), Embu County Government (ECG)
- Only use acronyms of large organizations such as FAO, WHO, etc.

6. Poor style

- Aim at being persuasive and interesting
- Avoid using too much tentative words such as “could have been due to, might, believe, etc.
- Such words indicate lack of confidence
- In science, research is objective and you should not use phrases such as “As I have said, I observed, I think ... and so on.
- Instead use phrases such as “results showed that ..., Results suggests that

7. Poor spelling, grammar and punctuation

- **Writing shows who you are.**
 - Accuracy is very important
 - It gives the right impression
 - Avoid common errors by spell-checks and attentiveness
 - Take particular care of nouns – don't write embu university, ku, nairobi university, etc.

- Keeping it simple, brief, and clear should help you avoid most common errors
- When you read a proposal or thesis full of errors, the conclusion you draw is that this is not a serious person however good the idea is.

Proposal presentation- Preparations

- Make sure you know exactly how long you will have to present, and prepare accordingly.
- If you are given 15 minutes to present, target about 15 slides (each slide per minute)
- Focus on the important aspects of your presentation

Preparations cont....

- Before coming to present, practice over and over again and time yourself.
- Slides should be clear (select fonts carefully)
- Avoid crowding tables and figures
- Slides 8-10 lines, well spread out

Focus on important areas only

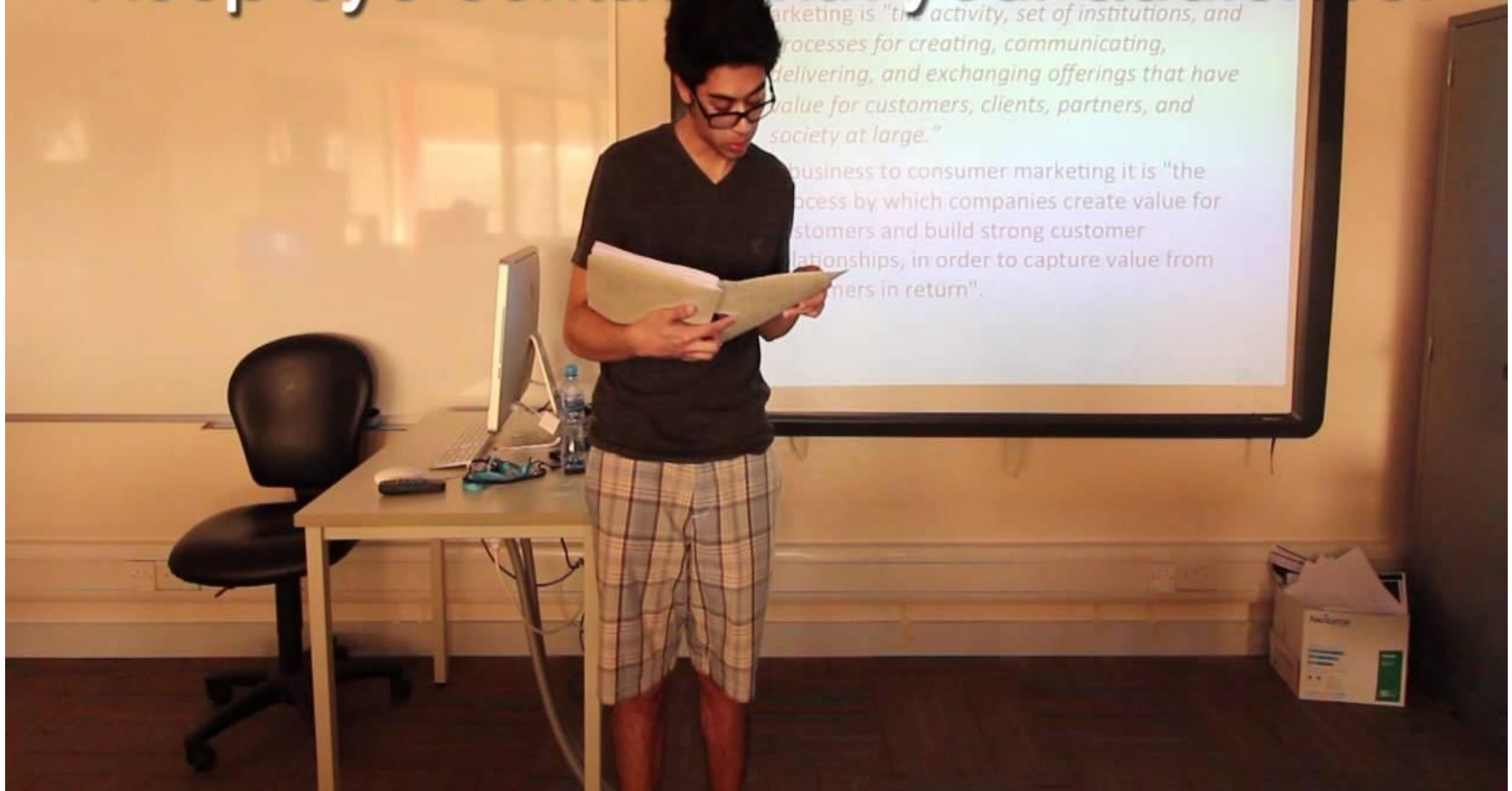
- Background information
- Problem statement
- Research questions
- Hypothesis
- General objective
- Specific objectives
- **Conceptual framework (optional depending on subject)**
- **Methodology (Very important)**
- **Results and discussion**
- **Conclusions**
- **Recommendations**

When presenting

- Avoiding presenting facing away from the audience – you loose them



9. Do not read directly from your notes. Keep eye contact with your audience.



Slides should not be too crowded



Keep contact with your viewers when presenting



Title slide

- Slide should have the topic, your name and those of the supervisors
- Do not read everything including your supervisors names. Let the audience read for themselves.
- Just open by saying “ My investigations were on
- Or my proposal is on the topic ... and then quickly move on to the second slide

Background slide

- You should be very brief
- Just present the key background to the study with 2 or 3 references
- Quickly jump to the next slide of research questions followed by hypothesis and research objectives.
- Do not include literature review in your presentation.

When presenting

- When presenting, do not strive to show with your technical expertise or command of English. You will lose your audience.
- Use plain language as far as possible
- Use photos, figures and tables whenever possible instead of descriptions

WHAT MATTERS MOST
IS HOW YOU SEE YOURSELF.



Thank you