

How to improve the quality of your proposal.

A new perspective on how to present your buyers with a proposal they enjoy reading and find compelling.

By Martin Eckstein

Bid Alchemy – How to improve the quality of your proposal.

Introduction

Often reviewing and editing proposals is a luxury that you cannot afford because of the pressures in writing. This is a big mistake and results in lower quality proposals than you want or need.

In Bid Alchemy's "**How to improve the quality of your proposal**" guide, we discussed the ways to improve the readability and compelling nature of your proposal. To make this work, you need to ensure that you are reviewing progress and putting in steps to ensure you do produce the proposal quality you need to win the deal.

In this guide Bid Alchemy explain the science and art of creating compelling proposals. It supplies simple methods that you can adopt to improve your writing quality and that of the team.

You are best to read this guide after the "**How customers make buying decisions**" guide. The Bid Alchemy "**How and when to review and edit your proposal**" will then provide you with advice on how to implement the improvements in your proposals.

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For information contact:

Martin.eckstein@bidalchemy.co.uk

<http://www.bidalchemy.co.uk>

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1. THE CHALLENGE IN CREATING A COMPELLING PROPOSAL

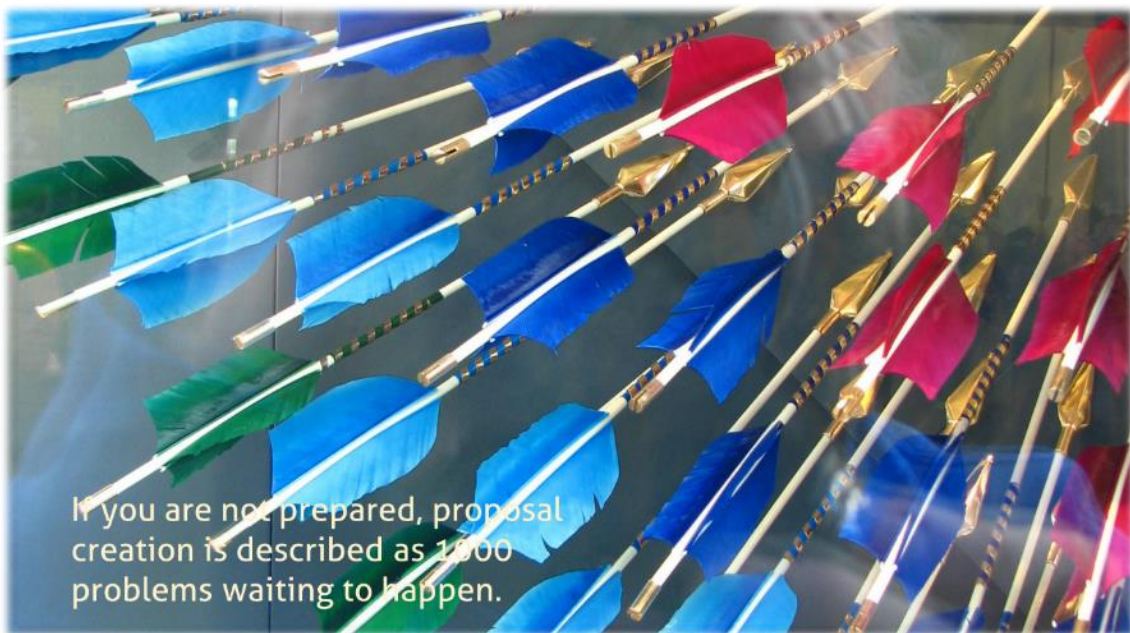
When we start the adventure of creating a new proposal, we want it to be compelling and that our buyers clearly understand and really enjoy reading.

After starting with good intentions, the problems and issues that come with any bid distract us. Sometimes, we just want to get the proposal finished and off to the customer.

Writing proposals is not as easy as people think. We need to supply the right answers, express our strengths, and show the weaknesses of the competition. It is easy to forget that we are writing for people. If they find our proposal difficult to read or boring, no matter how strong our proposition, we risk losing.

We are trying to draft a book, in less time than an author would get and with the added challenge of having multiple people supplying content (Content Writers).

Bid Alchemy understand this challenge and we know that the difference between a good proposal and a poor one, can be the difference between winning and losing.



The job of the Bid and Proposal Manager is to predict these problems and ensure they do not affect the quality of the proposal.

While writing is an art, and we are not all artists, the ability to create compelling text is in the world of science. What attracts people to a book, keeps them reading and engages their full minds, is a fascinating subject for which there has been significant research.

Bid Alchemy think combines the art and science to enable you to improve your writing style and that of your team. We support this with unique tooling that enables you to measure and improve the quality of your proposal and ensure that all those important activities are not forgotten.



The art of writing



The science of reading



Proposals are an art supported by science or science supported by art

This guide enables you to understand the mix of science and art that YOU require to produce proposals that your customers enjoy reading and want to select.

To the uninitiated, the creation of a proposal looks simple. Experts write about their expertise and we add in reusable text to supplement it. The Proposal Manager pulls this together and makes it look nice. Job done.

We know it is more difficult than that. Each of our Content Writers has their own writing style and ability to write. The writing of each piece of text can be in a different style. They do not mesh easily. The creation of reusable text has not had our customer in mind, it can be quite bland or irrelevant to their specific needs and wants.

Organisations enforce house styles which is a good attempt at gaining a common writing style across all Content Writers. However, it ignores the key challenge; customers and individual buyers have their own reading style. We need to be writing to this and not in the manner that makes us comfortable.



Words and pictures are incredibly powerful. They can start and end war, change your emotions, spark ideas. We use and need language and visuality in everything we do. Our proposals live in the binary word of either winning or losing. It is up to us, to arm our proposals with the most power we can.

With all the challenges that hit us during this proposal creation period, we can rely on the magic of the Proposal Manager. They will have the opportunity to edit our proposals and put everything right.

This may sound sensible in theory, they are the experts in writing, but it does not work. We give them little time to perform their magic, often less than we plan. We do not understand the multitude of activities they need to undertake to lift the quality. Whilst we recognise their writing ability, we forget that they are not the experts in the proposition, the customer

How to improve the quality of your proposal.

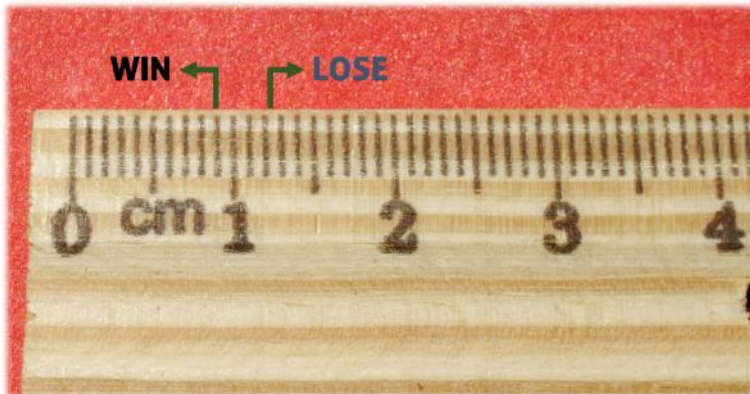
of the game of sales. Alone, they can make the proposal look presentable and remove embarrassing errors, but it is unfair to expect them to transform our writing into the compelling proposal that the customer cannot put down.

If we face the hard truth, often we celebrate the submission of our proposal, as if this is an achievement. It is what our organisation pays us to do. We give the best we can do within the time available. The only measure of the quality is that we ran out of time.

If we undertake it at all, measuring the quality of our proposal is often just a subjective factor. We ask someone to review the proposal and they come back with their opinion. However, they are telling you what they like and do not like in the document. They are not telling you what the buyers will think.

Bid Alchemy's "**How and when to review and edit your proposal**" guide will aid you in understanding our approach to getting value out of reviewing and how to achieve this without affecting the time available for writing.

This is so important because the quality of your proposal affects your ability to win the deal. It is not just appalling proposals, that we regret sending, that can turn a win into a loss. It is



the lack of clarity in one section, the boring look of the page, the complex message that the buyer does not interpret. It is the small things that can make the big difference.

When you come 2nd in a deal (the lead medal position), you lose by a small percentage. Bid

Alchemy research show this is often between 2% and 5%. If you were further away from the winner, then you would have been out of the race earlier.

Small improvements to our proposal can make the difference. Improvements in our writing style, the ability to measure and improve quality can turn a deal from lose to win.

We can achieve this, without the need to lower our price or increase the strength of our proposition.

How to improve the quality of your proposal.

Bid Alchemy analysis, show that a high-quality solution or proposition in a low-quality proposal can result in a loss.

Similarly, a good solution or proposition in a high-quality proposal can win.

We need to apply as equal focus on creating a high-quality proposal as we do to the solution confident that we will win.

When organisations are aware that they are in 2nd place, they tend to take knee-jerk actions. Dropping the price or increasing the proposition to grab the few percentage points that move them into 1st place.

To compensate for a poor proposal, we risk reducing our profit.

This is important to consider. All that effort by your organisation (and all that cost) could be a waste, purely because we submit a proposal which is hard for the customer to read and difficult for them to evaluate.



To be confident of winning, you need winning proposition and a high-quality proposal

The Angry Managing Director

This company were bidding for business that they really wanted to win. They also had good reasons to be confident. They held good relationships with the buyers, had a proven history of delighting the customer in other contracts and the proposition was extremely competitive in both price and benefits.

As a key bid for this organisation, it had the eye and participation of the Managing Director, "Whatever you need to win this deal, just let me know".

It came as surprise, after the submission of the proposal, that they did not even make the short-list. The MD called the team into his office and asked what had happened. No one could really answer him, but it became clear that the team were passing the blame between each other and also the competitors who were "obviously buying the business".

Within an answer, the MD arranged to meet the customer. The MD was ready to explain how disappointed he was, given the effort and long-standing relationship. However, his opposite number, stopped him in full flow, just by opening the proposal and pointing to paragraphs of text that made no sense.

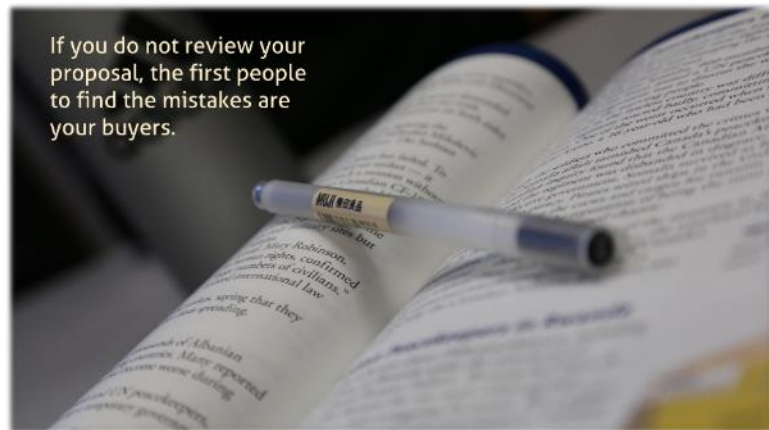
Embarrassed, the MD left and shortened the career of the Bid Manager.

How to improve the quality of your proposal.

We may ask someone to review our proposal. Whilst this is a useful practice, it does have flaws. They may find a significant number of errors and you may not have the time to put this right. They will be reviewing your proposal and evaluating it against their preferred read style. This may be acceptable, but it may be that they customer would find our key messages more compelling in a different style.

Sometimes, the review will be the RED event. This is a common misunderstanding on the purpose of this key review. The RED event is to Read, Evaluate and Decide improvements to the proposal. It is to ensure that the proposal is a compelling document, that best represents the reasons for selection us and does not contain material mistakes that could affect the commercial success of the contract. I explain the value and purpose of the RED event within Bid Alchemy's guide, "**How to perform successful RED events**".

We understand that the quality of our proposal is important to us, as important as the quality of our proposition. However, we are reliant on the quality of our writing We need all Content Writers to use a writing style close to the reading style of the buyers.



This is easy to say and yet not too easy to achieve. It is hard to change your embedded writing style and even harder to get other contributors to do the same. This is especially when they may not be so convinced on the science of proposal writing.

We also need to consider human nature. Our Content Writers have been writing, as part of their profession, for years. It is not possible that suddenly they have become poor writers. I have experienced people get quite angry at any suggestion there is a problem with their writing quality. When it is me or a reviewer, giving this feeling, then it is fair to understand why. We are just being as subjective as they are.

Taking on the challenge of learning to change your writing style, whilst also trying to develop the winning proposition, is hard. We need events to review and improve the quality of writing (edits), during its development.

The **Alchemy Proposal toolkit** is a unique way of finding the elements that need improving. It removes the subjectivity as it provides an objective and measurable with its roots in the science of reading.

When you support this with a Proposal Manager or Proposal Writer, undertaking an edit of the proposal sections, you can achieve this.



You cannot outsource the quality of your proposal onto the Proposal Manager.

You will not give them the time to do this. They are also not going to be the best person to truly make your document more compelling, as they will not be an expert in the proposition.

We all need to improve the quality and style of our writing. The best way of achieving this, is in small steps. To do this, Bid Alchemy define the eight attributes that support writing clear, compelling, and enticing documents. The **Alchemy Proposal toolkit** embeds these as the measures. Each attribute breaks down into the components and these into the elements. It is the elements that you review and can become the small steps for improvement. You will find out more about this approach later in this guide.

As each customer and buyers have different reading styles, you can tailor the toolkit to match.

These attributes are the basis for the science of reading. Organisations have invested fortunes to decide on the most effect writing styles and it makes sense to exploit this investment.

Think about companies who sell to the public (B2C), they need their products to ‘jump off the shelf’ and convince the customer to buy. To them, every word, how it looks and how it makes the customer feel, is particularly important.

When you do decide to take on the challenge of improving your writing, Bid Alchemy recommend that you select just one guideline at a time. Keep practicing with it until it becomes second nature. You have now embedded the improvement into your writing style.



We describe the science of each guideline and how you can improve your usage of I, in the following chapter.

2. THE EIGHT GUIDELINES FOR PROPOSAL WRITING

This guide is to help you improve your writing style; it is not a comprehensive writing guide. You will find books and learning courses that can support you in improving your writing in alliance to these attributes.

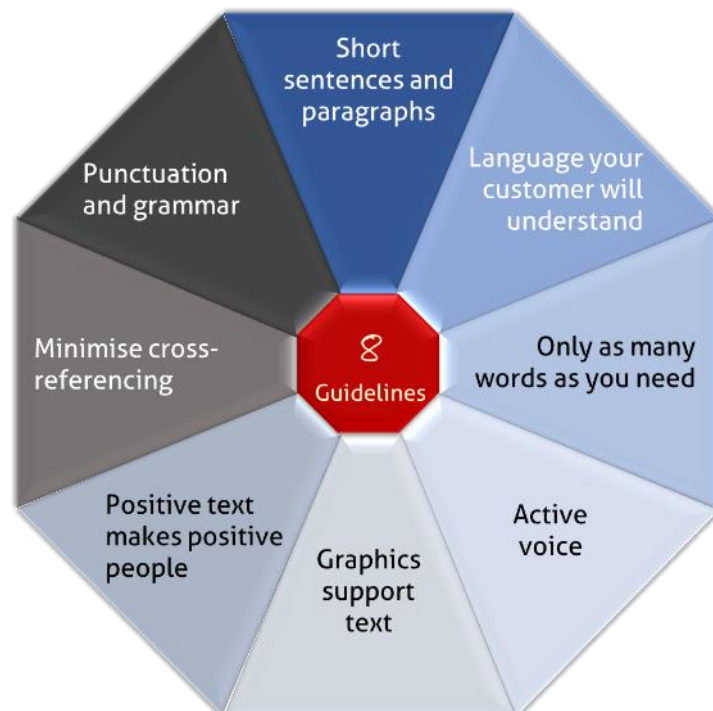
We all have a learning style and as these differ, I do not recommend any particular book or course, but recommend that you investigate and, if appropriate gain support from your company's learning resources. We, in Bid Alchemy, are also on a learning journey to improve the quality of our writing, so we are not the masters.

The Publishing Industry deploys similar guidelines. Using these, journalists produce consistent articles, with a common style that attracts their buyers to buy. Their timeframes are usually much shorter than what we work to.

For them, the guidelines are part of their day-to-day activities and have become second nature. We should also target these techniques to create the best possible proposals.



While you are gaining familiarity with using them and embedding them into your writing style, you may wish to print them out to keep them visible and at the front of your mind.



By using these eight attributes, you will produce higher quality proposals that the customer enjoys reading and helps them make a positive buy decision.

2.1 WRITING SHORT SENTENCES AND PARAGRAPHS

You should aim for sentences of 11 words and no more than 20



Research shows that sentences of 11 words are easiest to read. When sentences consist of 20 or more words, they start to become difficult. At 25 they are difficult and above 29 word they are exceedingly difficult. A simple test, that I use, is if you cannot say the sentence without taking a breath, it is too long.



One of your buyers (your audience), may have a cognitive disability, such as dyslexia. The longer your sentences are, the less likely they are to clearly understand your message.

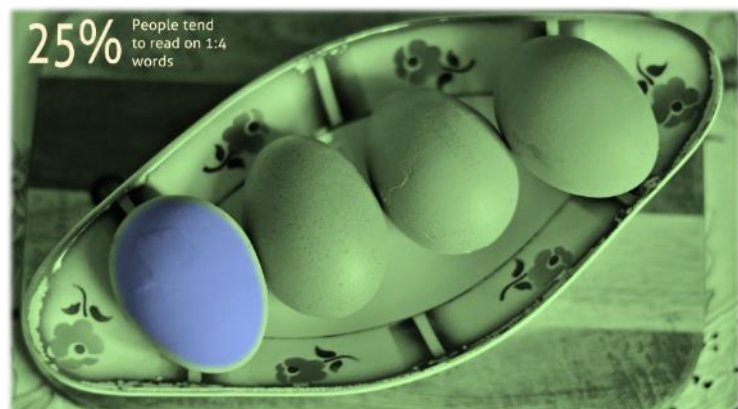
Even people who are very literate struggle to read long sentences and often just do not bother.

All that hard thinking the team do, could be a waste, due to the lack of a full-stop.

It is a mistake to think that your buyers are going to actively read your proposal. People tend not to read them. I know this can be a painful thought, given the effort we put in to create them.

People tend to scan proposals, rather than read them. When people scan documents, they tend to read on 25% of what is on the page. You need to ensure that they get to the important information, quickly.

The Content Writers are thinking about the question whilst they are writing the answer. Their text is the result of their brain whirling. The text is often poorly constructed and far longer than it needs to be. There is nothing wrong with this if they return to that text and edit it.



Sometimes, when faced with a blank page, contributors just start writing so that the page is not empty. It gives them a good feeling that they are making progress. Again, whatever it

takes to get the writing task done, but it the Content Writer or a Proposal Manager needs to go back and edit it.

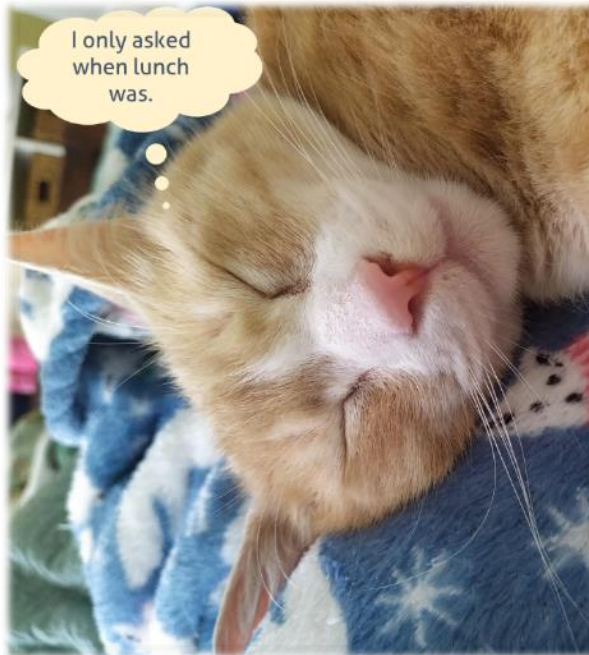


There are people who just like writing long sentences. There are people like talking, even if they have nothing to say! In Bid Alchemy, we call this **Fluff** and when it is unbelievably bad **Super-Fluff!**

It is very unfair of me, but the best exponents of Super-Fluff I meet are Sales Professionals and Marketeers.

Examples of Super-Fluff

“It gives us, Acme Corporation, absolute pleasure to submit, this our Proposal for the development, installation, management and on-going support of our world-leading, award winning, cost effective Acme FNX111-1S box making machine; the fastest box maker on the market, as awarded by Box Makers Journal, December 2019, for your perusal and evaluation.”

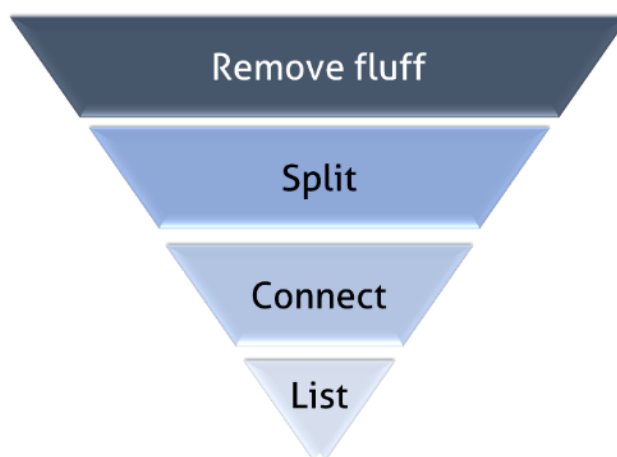


Well, I have to go to the shops and you know how busy they can be on a Saturday. Last week, I had to queue for hours and then, when I got to the till, it broke. Then, I went to the other shop, but they did not have the variety of food you like. It has gone right downhill since it was taken over by that big chain. So I went to the pet store and you know what she is like, could talk the hind leg off a donkey.

That reminds me, I must get something for Sunday lunch, the whole family are coming over. I suspect you will make yourself scarce. I do not think you like my family. I wish I could make myself scarce, but I suppose it is my turn to cook. Better than eating Aunt Edna's roast lamb last week. I swear I could hardly chew it. I would have brought some home for you, but I like you to much.

These are made-up examples, but I am sure we have all worked with someone who can write or talk like this and see no problem with it.

Bid Alchemy have useful tools for when you need to reduce the length of sentences and paragraphs. They are easy to bring into your learning. Soon you will find that short sentences become 2nd nature.



These four steps can significantly reduce the length of your sentences.

To illustrate how to use these four steps with an example. This is not text from a real proposal. However, I have seen remarkably similar in proposals. The problem is that once you deliver a proposal, it is extremely hard to change.

Example Text

We will deploy our team of experienced planners and designers to work with your project team to define the installation, testing and implementation of the Acme Box Maker, FNX111-1S that you have purchased and that will be to the highest standard, meeting the requirements of ISO202020 and documented, with full user guides and maintenance notes meeting the requirements of ISO90001 and being compliant with Level 3 box making requirements.

2.1.1 REMOVE FLUFF

Fluff is verbiage. Words that add nothing to your sentence and make it more difficult to spot the important ones.

Example Text – Removing Fluff

We will **deploy our team of experienced planners and designers to** work with your project team to define the installation, testing and implementation of the Acme Box Maker, **FNX111-1S that you have purchased and that will be to the highest standard,** meeting the requirements of ISO202020 and documented, with full user guides and maintenance notes meeting the requirements of ISO90001 and being compliant with Level 3 box making requirements.

The words **high-lighted in blue** are ones that are safe just to remove. Who would we be deploying, except our team of experienced planners and designers? Why would we be doing this unless the customer has bought the machine from us?

The **yellow highlighted** words may require thinking about. They may be fluff, but depending on the proposition, they may be important. You may wish to discuss them with the contributor before deciding.

When you have found the fluff, you just need to cut it out.

Example Text – Fluff removed

We will work with your project team to define the installation, testing and implementation of the Acme Box Maker that will meet the requirements of ISO202020 and documented, with full user guides and maintenance notes meeting the requirements of ISO90001 and being compliant with Level 3 box making requirements.

You can see that the sentence is now shorter. That alone makes it more tempting to read, rather than scan.

2.1.2 SPLIT

Here, we look for connecting words, such as ‘and’, ‘but’, ‘with’ and ‘that’. These give a natural opportunity to split the long sentence in to two.

Example Text – Splitting the sentence

We will work with your project team to define the installation, testing **and** implementation of the Acme Box Maker **that** will meet the requirements of ISO202020 **and** documented, **with** full user guides and maintenance notes meeting the requirements of ISO90001 and being compliant **with** Level 3 box making requirements.

In the example, I have highlighted the connecting words. We need some for the structure of the text to make sense. The blue example can sensibly make a split.

Example Text – Sentence Split

We will work with your project team to define the installation, testing and implementation of the Acme Box Maker. That will meet the requirements of ISO202020 and documented, with full user guides and maintenance notes meeting the requirements of ISO90001 and being compliant with Level 3 box making requirements.

Whilst this has made two sentences, the second is still long and its introduction needs some work. This is where you bring in the third step (connect).

2.1.3 CONNECT

We use connecting words to link the two sentences together. This may require adding or changing a word. In our example, we will replace the word ‘that’ with ‘this’.

Example Text – Sentence Connected

We will work with your project team to define the installation, testing and implementation of the Acme Box Maker. This will meet the requirements of ISO202020 and documented, with full user guides and maintenance notes meeting the requirements of ISO90001 and being compliant with Level 3 box making requirements.

We still have too much information within the second sentence. This includes points that are important. We do not want to devalue our proposition just to have shorter sentences. So here, we deploy the fourth step, (lists).

2.1.4 LISTS

Lists are a useful tool for making your longer sentences more visibly appealing to the buyer. An overuse of commas is a good way to spot where a list may be better.

Example Text – Sentence Connected

We will work with your project team to define the installation, testing and implementation of the Acme Box Maker. This will meet the requirements of ISO202020 and documented, with full user guides and maintenance notes meeting the requirements of ISO90001 and being compliant with Level 3 box making requirements.

We have features of our solution that we want the customer to note. These may be important to the customer's evaluation of our proposition. Turn the highlighted text into bullet points. You may need to restructure the text for it to be correct.

Example Text – Making Lists

We will work with your project team to define the installation, testing and implementation of the Acme Box Maker. This will:

- ☰ meet the requirements of ISO202020
- ☰ and documented, with full user guides and maintenance notes
- ☰ meeting the requirements of ISO90001
- ☰ and being compliant with Level 3 box making requirements.

When using lists, you should go back to step one and look for verbiage as well as looking to see if you need to undertake any restructuring.

Example Text – Making Lists

We will work with your project team to define the installation, testing and implementation of the Acme Box Maker. This will:

- ☰ meet the requirements of ISO202020
- ☰ documented with full user guides and maintenance notes
- ☰ meet the requirements of ISO90001
- ☰ be compliant with Level 3 box making requirements

In Bid Alchemy we do not use full-stop within lists. Others may use them. You need to ensure that you have a consistent approach throughout your proposal.

Lists draw the eye towards them. They tend to be read rather than scanned and enable the buyer to put a mental tick against each point.

However, overuse of lists can have the opposite effect, buyers scan them, missing key points. They can also make your proposal look lazy or less professional.

2.1.5 REDUCING THE SIZE OF YOUR PARAGRAPHS.

The same challenge for short sentences is also true for paragraphs. When a buyer sees a long paragraph, their brain says that it is going to be a hard task to interpret. This can cause scanning or skipping over the paragraph to the next easier piece to read.

A good paragraph is less than 6 sentences and less than 200 words. Below this makes the paragraph visible achievable for our sub-conscious.

In our proposals, we may wish to have far shorter paragraphs, even to just one sentence. A paragraph should carry only one key point. By separating these key points, the buyer can perform a mental tick list on your writing.

Example of shortening paragraphs

We will provide you with a £10m saving against your current costs. This is higher than your expected savings of £8m. We will also reduce the costs by an added 2% per year through our proven approach to continuous improvements. This means that at the end of the contract, you will be receiving the service at £15m below today's costs. We are leaders in the provision of this service and have a record of proving customer will consistently service at this lower cost.

Shortened paragraphs.

We will provide you with a £10m saving against your current costs. This is higher than your expected savings of £8m.

We will also reduce the costs by an added 2% per year through our proven approach to continuous improvements. This means that at the end of the contract, you will be receiving the service at £15m below today's costs.

We are leaders in the provision of this service and have a record of proving customer will consistently service at this lower cost.

By making paragraph breaks, the text is more appealing to the eye. Each paragraph holds one of the three selling point.

Sometimes, you do need to re-introduce the paragraph which you achieve as with connecting, described earlier.

2.2 USE LANGUAGE YOUR BUYERS WILL UNDERSTAND.

Using clear, simple language means all your readers will understand your proposal.



Research shows that the average reading age in the UK is that of a 9-year-old. If you did not know that, I expect you find that quite shocking. However, it is true.

The average reading age for newspapers is an indicator for the reading age we should aim for.



8 year old reading age.



14 year old reading age.

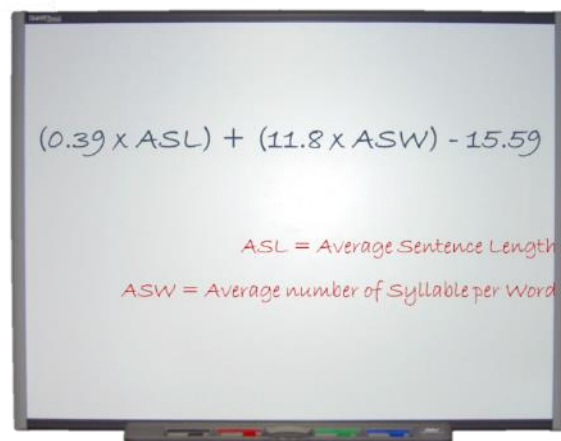
To attract buyers, the reading age of newspapers is lower than you may think.

This suggest that we should write our proposals as if our audience have the reading capabilities of a 14-year-old.

One method of evaluating your proposal to find its reading age is the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score. This formula uses:

- ☰ total number of words
- ☰ number syllables
- ☰ total number of sentences.

The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score for a reading age of 14 is 10.3. Microsoft Word can assess the score for your proposal. This is available under the proofing function.



When you start assessing your document under this scoring, the first score is going to be high. Many of us develop our current writing styles at college and university, so are writing at a higher level. This is one of those rare instances that you must learn to reduce rather than increase. It is not that easy.

Flesch Kincaid is a mathematical formula. Writing is more artistic than it alone can measure. So, I recommend you use it just as a guideline and overtime aim to achieve scores within the 10s and certainly under 14.2, which is the reading age of a college student.

Bid Alchemy supply tips to aid writing and editing to meet these read age guidelines. These are available for you to practice until they become second nature.

2.2.1 THE BUYERS AND CUSTOMER PREFERRED READING STYLE.

Each of your buyers will have a preferred reading style. The better you know them, the more likely you are to understand this. If you can find sections of your proposal that are going to be of most interest to that buyer, you should reflect their style. For example, if they are a very visual person, you may wish to increase the number of graphical representations. If they are very academic, you may wish to include more complex words.

People's reading style is often mirrored in their writing style, so if you documents from them, this may give you a good idea of how it is best to respond.



We call complex text,
an Eric Morecombe.
*All the right words, just
not necessarily in the
right order.*

Organisations may also have their own styles. You can often discover this by going to their corporate website and downloading their documents. Do not use their annual report as this is going to be prepared in a specific style and by their auditors.

You can calibrate the **Alchemy Proposal Toolkit** to reflect the reading style that you wish to achieve. It is a good and unique method for measuring the quality of your proposal and to ensure you create the documents you wanted.

2.2.2 USE WORDS THAT PEOPLE ACTUALLY SPEAK.

When writing into proposals, Content Writers can start using language that they do not use in day to day conversations. People associate these words with being professional. There are academic people who do use complex words in their normal conversation. They may not be aware that their audience do not necessarily understand everything they say.

Example of using words we rarely speak

You will not be **obliged** to inform us of small instances that do not **consequently incur** a service issue.

Becomes

You do not need to inform us of small instances that do not result in a service issue.

2.2.3 EXPLAIN COMPLEX WORDS

We have a series of industry words that we may understand. Within our workplace, they may be part of our common language. If we use them in our social environment, our friends may give us strange looks.

We may need complex words in our proposal, but we need to consider that our buyers may not understand them. They may be in a different industry to us. For example, I have spent years Bid Managing for IT (Information Technology) companies. It is rare that the prospective customer has also been in the IT industry.

Our buyers will also have their own industry language and there may be shared acronyms between our industries. The common acronym can have a quite different meaning.

Keep industry words, acronyms, and jargon to a minimum. When you do use an acronym for the first time, include its means between brackets. Bid Alchemy suggest that you do this for the first time you use the acronym within a proposal section or chapter. Often buyers focus on the chapter that most relates to them.

Example of Acronyms

The CfMS will be your first point of contact for any incident.

Becomes

The CfMS (Centre for Managed Services) will be your first point of contact for any incident.

Consider including a dictionary of terms within your proposal. If you are giving a physical version, it is good to have this dictionary as a loose document, so that the buyer has it to hand.

Where you are using industry jargon or words, consider whether you need to add a short phrase starting 'Which means'.

Also consider whether you should be using the acronym at all. It may be easier (for the buyers to read) if you reshaped the sentence to eliminate the acronym.

Example of Acronyms

The CfMS (Centre for Managed Services) will be your first point of contact for any incident.

Becomes

Your first point of contact for any incident will be our Centre for Managed Services.

2.2.4 WORDS THAT SOUND SIMILAR BUT HAVE DIFFERENT MEANS

With the English Language, there are words that sound similar and yet have quite different meanings. We call these words homophones.

Using the wrong word can significantly change the power of our proposition or the commercial offering we thought we were presenting.

A great example of this is the difference between ‘assure’, ‘ensure’ and ‘insure’

In the table below, you can see how the use of these different words, changes what the customer will interpret from our statement.

We assure/ensure/insure that the service will start on 1 st July 2022.		
Word	Meaning	
Assure	The matter will be taken care and not to worry about it. It dispels doubts.	They can have increased confidence that we will deliver the service on 1 st July 2022.
Ensure	Makes certain that something will occur or be the case	That can be certain that we will deliver the service on 1 st July 2022.
Insure	Arrangement for compensation if damage to or loss resulting from failure.	If we do not deliver on 1 st July 2020, they can claim compensation for any losses they suffer.

Other misused that are often in proposals include:

Word	Meaning	Example Sentence	What the writer means	Correct word
Affect	Pretend	This will affect the performance.	Change or influence	Effect
Biannual	Twice a year	We will hold a service level review biannually.	Once every two years	Biennial
Coarse	Rough	The coarse will provide all candidates with the right level of knowledge.	Learning event	Course
Defused	To remove a fuse	This will defuse across the estate.	To spread out	Diffuse
Dessert	Pudding	These desserts an award.	Deserves	Desert
Discreet	Secretive or trustworthy	This is be a discreet system.	Separate	Discrete
Fare	Food or transport cost	It will be a fare method to resolve issues.	Impartial	Fair
Incidence	Rate of incurrence	The incidence will be on the second Monday of the month.	Event	Incident
Principle	Rule of conduct	The principle approach will be to.	Main	Principal

2.2.5 WORD THAT CAN HAVE MULTIPLE MEANINGS

Words can have multiple meanings. We call these words homonyms. Sometimes they have a specific meaning, but the interpretation may be something different. The use of these words can result in the buyer holding a different understanding to what you wished to portray. A great example is the word “can”.

Examples of a word with multiple meanings.

*We will supply the result in a **minute** time.* We will supply the result in a small amount of time or in 60 seconds.

*We **can** meet the requirement of...* You will meet the requirement, or you will not meet the requirement, whichever way the buyer wishes to evaluate it.

2.2.6 WORDS THAT CAN BE INTERPRETED AS WEAK.

There are words that in conversation, the way we pronounce them gives the listener a good idea of what our intent is. In writing, they may make our proposal read weaker than we want. These words may also have multiple meanings.

If use these words, think about how else you could give the same intention and always use them wisely, understanding the impact they could make. Poor use can result in the customer evaluating our proposition lower than we intend.

Word	Example sentence	How the customer may read it
Can	We can supply the added services you require.	You will supply the service, or you will not.
Believe	We believe that our proposition meets all your requirements.	You are unsure or do not know whether you meet their requirements.
Could	We could supply the products earlier.	You will or will not supply the services earlier.
May	We may require added resources.	You do not have enough resources.
Think	We think that the best approach.	You do not know that this is the best approach.
Assume	We assume that the other suppliers will...	You do not know; you are just guessing.
Shall	We shall supply the products by 20 th March 2022.	You will supply the products by 20 th March 2022.
About	We will supply the products on about 20 th March 2020.	You do not know when you will be able to supply the products.
Almost	We will supply almost all the products one week early.	You do not know when you will supply the total number of products.
May be	It may be possible to start early.	You do not know if it is possible to start early.
Opinion	In our opinion the best approach is...	You do not know and are just guessing.

2.2.7 WORD THAT ARE OFTEN SPELT INCORRECTLY

We often rely on Microsoft word to check our spelling. However, it cannot always notice that these words then spell another word. It is easy for these to slip into your proposal and can reduce the professional impact of the document. Sometimes, they can also change the meaning of the sentence, giving the customer the wrong interpretation.

Example of a miss-spelt word

We are complaint with all your requirement. We are compliant with all your requirements.

2.2.8 WORDS THAT COULD HAVE COMMERCIAL CONSEQUENCES

There are words that can hold legal or commercial defined definitions within your proposal. This depends on the country that you are in and to whom you are sending it.

A sentence your write could hold a legal interpretation, should the customer wish to take legal action against your company. It may also mean that the customer may wish to hold you to contractual terms that they could interpret, but you did not mean.

Best practice is to avoid using these words. It is always good practice for suitably skilled person performs a commercial review of your proposal.

Word	Example sentence	How it may be legally interpreted
Accommodate	We can accommodate the need for an addition 50 products.	Something we do at no cost.
Actionable	It will be actionable	Have grounds for legal action.
May	We may supply the products by 20 th March 2020.	Can mean: We will supply.
Shall	We shall be able to supply the products by 20 th March 2020.	Can mean: We will provide.
Arbitrary	We will make an arbitrary decision	The decision is at the court's discretion.

2.2.9 ANSWER THE QUESTION

Our proposals can be responses to customer questions. Often these responses form part of the evaluation criteria. It is important that we give responses that will rate highly.

Answers that should score well do not answer the question. The most common error is that the response does not say that we meet the customer requirement.

Example of a poor response

Customer Question: “*Can you provide your cabinets in red?*”

At ACME Corporation, we are proud of our ability to supply our cabinets in a rainbow of colours. We offer a choice of 6 colours for our standard ranges. We include the full pantone charts and associated painting and content details, as an appendix.

We apply each colour to the cabinet in the manufacturing process by ultramodern robots that perform continuous quality checks. We undertake the painting process in three stages over a period of 2 days, allowing significant drying and adherence time – something not done by other companies.

Our paints are kind to the environment, and we source the raw ingredients are only sustainable sources. Uniquely, we have won 3 awards for our environmental standards.

By manufacturing our own cabinets, we are also able to intercept the process to supply our cabinets in any pantone colour and are also able to incorporate customer logos into the design.

Our association with ACME Design, means that we can also supply a service to redesign your premises to gain the greatest visual impact from the procurement of the new cabinets.

This response does not say that we will supply the cabinets in red. There is an inference within the response and if the customer went to the effort of review the pantone charts, they could see that we supply them in red. The challenge is, why do you want to make it difficult for the customer to score you highly?

Bid Alchemy recommend the following approach to responding to questions. This approach makes it easy for the customer to mark that you are compliant. It also gives a rational approach that enables the customer to evaluate the added benefits your approach provides. This results in you achieving the score your proposition deserves.

- ☰ State that you meet the requirement. The easiest method for achieving this is to reshape the customer question into your answer. *We supply our cabinets in RED.*
- ☰ Explain how you achieve this and the benefit this derives.
- ☰ Give any added features that your proposition provides that the customer may value and result in an increase to the evaluation score.

Example of a good response.

Customer Question: “*Can you supply your cabinets in red?*”

We supply our cabinets in red. It is one of six colours available to you from our standard range.

We use environmentally friendly paint products. We apply these during the manufacturing process and use continuous automated quality checks. We allow significant time for the drying and adherence processes. This makes the paint quality robust, with no fading within ten years.

If you need a pantone colour, we will provide this for you at an added charge. We would perform this during the manufacturing process to supply the same no-fade guarantee.





2.2.10 DO NOT DROWN YOUR PROPOSAL IN FEATURES AND DISCRIMINATORS.

There is a difference between a marketing brochure and a proposal. A marketing brochure has an audience of prospective customers while we focus a proposal on one customer, at one point in time, for one challenge.

Marketing Brochures often have pages of features and benefits. It can be very tempting to copy and paste these into the proposal. However, this can result in the customer not being able to see the wood for the trees!

In proposals our benefits must be a value to that customer (measurable in value that supports the achievement of the customer business case). You can expect to have between 4 and no more than 8 benefits within a proposal.

Features do not have a place in the proposal. In proposals we use, discriminators. A strong discriminator is something that we can say that:

-  None of the completion can say
-  We can do better than the completion
-  Adds measurable value against the business case
-  Matters to the customer

Not all discriminators are this strong, so it is good to be able to measure the strength of your discriminators. By doing this you can select the strongest to go into your proposal.

Whilst it can be difficult to not exclude discriminators, less is often better than more. By including weak discriminators, you risk devaluing the strong ones, in your customers mind.

The **Alchemy Discriminator Tool** is available for you to measure the strength of each and then select.

Alchemy Discriminator Toolkit					BID ALCHEMY
Discriminator	Can the competition claim the same?	Can the competition do better?	Does it add value?	Does it matter to the customer?	Strength
Reliability of widget making machines	One Can	None	Yes directly	Yes	Very Strong
Independent accreditations, standards and customer feedback.	Some Can	None	Yes indirectly	Yes	Strong
Integrations with legacy machines	Some Can	Yes Some	Yes directly	Yes	Weak
Service provision and reliable fix	Some Can	Yes Some	Yes indirectly	Some what	Very Weak
Contract Flexibility	Some Can	Yes Some	Yes directly	Yes	Weak

This simple to use toolkit allows you to evaluate the strength of your discriminators.

From the example above, you can see the discriminators. Each has the answers to the four questions. The tool evaluates the strength and allows us to choose which are suitable for our proposal. We may choose only the “strong” and “very strong” discriminators.

2.2.11 SUMMARY THOUGHTS

To use the language that your customer will understand, we may need to change our writing style. We should use simple and clear words. We need avoid words that may have multiple meanings or could have a commercial impact on our proposal.

We need to ensure that we have adequate time, in our proposal plan, for reviewing and editing our document. This will ensure that we are not using the wrong words by mistake.

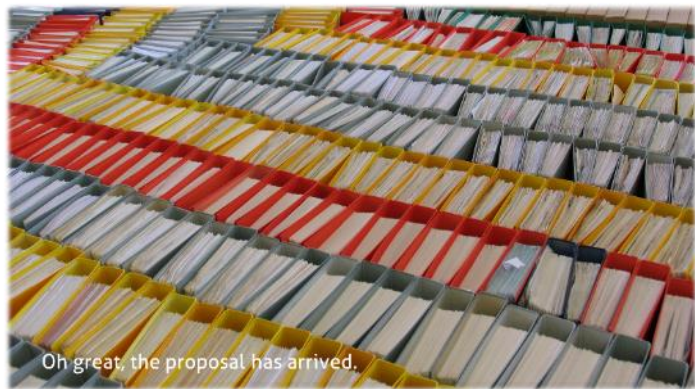
2.3 ONLY USE AS MANY WORDS AS YOU NEED.

Poorly prepared proposals are up to 33% larger than necessary.

Without planning, we create documents that are longer than necessary. Less is certainly more, to entice our customers to read and can clearly evaluate our proposition.

Think of your buyers. Soon after we have finished the hard job of writing our proposals, they have the task of reading them. When our proposal arrives, it is not alone. There is usually between 3 and 6 competitive proposals in the mix.

Our customer is not eagerly awaiting this day. They will have limited time to review the submissions and still have their day job to do.



Bigger documents are visibly less enticing. They seem like more work to do. The buyers may leave this to last to review. Research shows that when the buyer reads the first proposal, they use it as a marker for the following ones which can have a more critical evaluation.

We write more about things we know. We may include 10 pages of well-prepared reusable text about our environmental approach. However, this may only score 1% of the evaluation criteria. We will need to start afresh to write our response about how we will integrate our solution into their current environment This may only result in 5 pages and yet it may be worth 10% of the evaluation. Our proposal may look good, but the weighting is wrong.



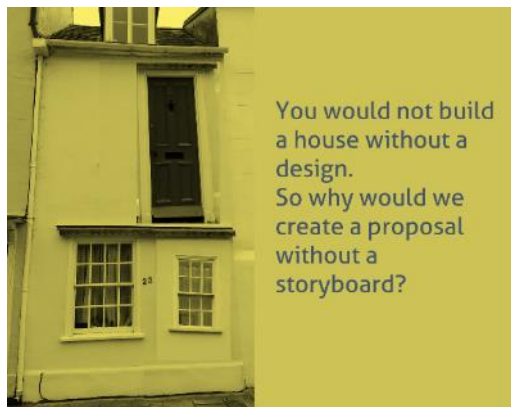
If you do not put page limits our Content Writers can write any amount. When you do put limits, writers tend to provide you with text within 10%.

Customers may give us word or page limits. Content Writer complain that the customer is mad to think they could write only one page. Usually they have ignored the word or page limit and just written their response. Once it is too long, it is a struggle to reduce.

How to improve the quality of your proposal.

This can lead to strange behaviour. Bid teams start reducing margins and font sizes as an easy fix to page limits. Obviously, this is not the best approach.

You can deploy the practices to rectify long sentences and paragraphs. However, this requires editing and that may be time that you do not have. Bid Alchemy recommend that each proposal should start with a storyboard.



The storyboard forms the plan for the creation of your proposal. Without it, you are building blind. Imagine building a house and not having full plans. The result is unlikely to be what you wanted.

By storyboarding, you decide on what the proposal want to produce, should look like. You also provide your Content Writers with blueprints for what they should be writing. The more prescriptive you are, the more you help them.

Bid Alchemy enable you to take your storyboard and represent this in a plan for you and your Content Writers. It informs them on what should be in each section, whether there should be a graphic and how much they should write for each sub-section. The **Alchemy Content Tool** is available for you to undertake this thinking.

Alchemy Content Toolkit

Section	Title	Content Owner	Pages
1	Award winning service at 20% less cost	Sam Sales Person	13
2	Flexible Service that drives continuous improvement	George Service	9
3	Driving down your costs whilst delivering higher quality	Pete Improvement	6
4	Confidently meeting and beating your deadlines	Gene Project	8
5	Delivery a service that enables your organisation to	Sam Sales Person	5

Alchemy Content Toolkit section Content

Title	Award winning service at 20% less cost		Section Owner	Sam Sales Person		
	Sub-Section Title	SS Owner	Content Bullets	Key Message	Graphics	Pages
1	Introduction	Sam	Meet all requirements Lower cost from day 1 Continuous Service improvement Savings	We provide a reduction of 20% on today's costs and will drive down costs a further 2% each year.	Chart showing costs per year against current contract.	1
2	Service designed on proven success.	George	Service design explanation Cases of proven service		Service design	2
3	Driving down cost and lifting service performance	Pete	CSI Approach and success Awards and case studies	Our CSI approach is proven to drive down costs by at least 2% per year whilst increasing performance and customer satisfaction.	Photo of team undertaking CSI	4
4	Confidence in our delivery	Gene	Programme Plan Transition approach Proven Performance		Project timeline	4
5	Delivering benefits for your business to succeed	Sam	List of benefits List of discriminators Confidence in selecting us			2

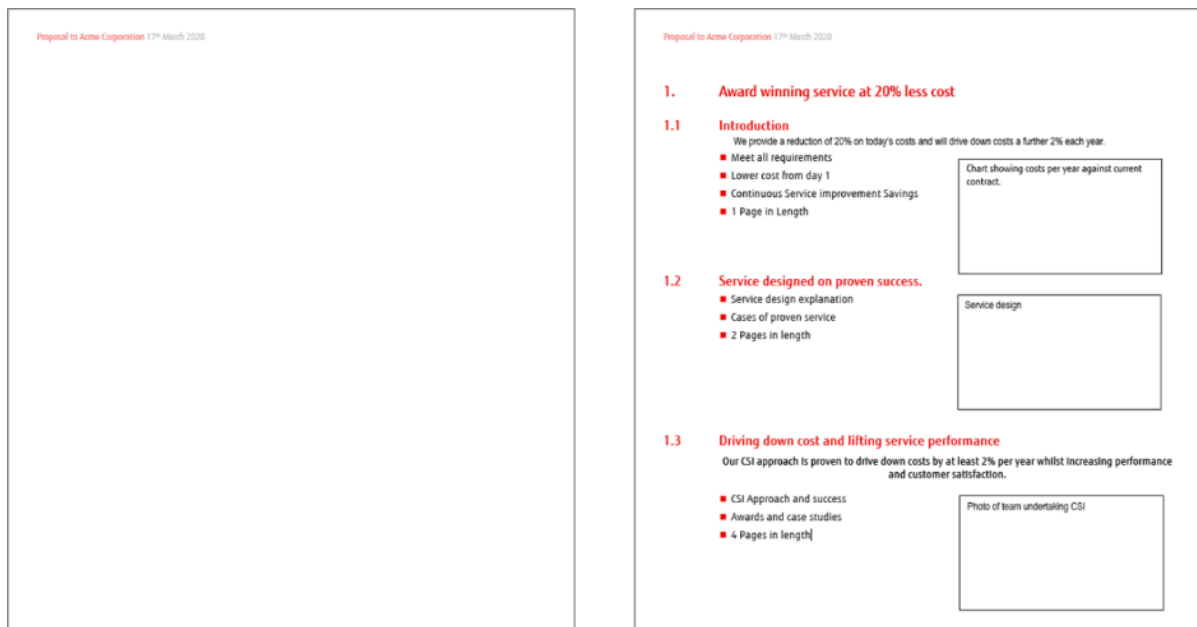
The Content toolkit enables you to define the size and content of your proposal.

How to improve the quality of your proposal.

This approach enables you to define the key attributes that define your proposal. Rather than starting with a blank page, you are giving your Content Writers direction on what they should write about. You are defining the size for each section and sub-section. Whilst your Content Writers may not hit the page size, they will be within 10%.

The toolkit also provides you with a contents list and page count for your proposal. By undertaking this approach, you can feel in control of your proposal as it develops. You are now able to review sections to ensure that they have the content and are of a size that you planned.

If you want to provide your Content Writers with the best support and direction, I bid Alchemy recommend that you transpose these details into your proposal templates. By doing this, effectively, you are just asking your Content Writers to fill in the blanks.



Content Writers find it much easier to write when they have direction. A blank sheet of paper gives no direction.

2.4 USE AN ACTIVE VOICE

Passive text is read passively. You want your readers to actively engage with your proposal.



It is easy to use the past tense when writing about the present or future. Our education systems also equate good writing with formality and detachment. Your education may have been within this approach, so your natural style is to write in a passive manner.

We interpret passive text as weaker than active text. The buyer is also more likely to just scan it, rather than read it.

Microsoft Word proofing tool will find passive text. Usually, it will underline it with a blue line.

There are simple techniques to change passive text to active text. The more you use these, the less passive text you will write.

The Problem with Microsoft Word Proofing

I was once talking to a Sales Professional about their draft Executive Summary. I mentioned that it was in the passive tense. *"It is the way I was taught at school"*, exclaimed the Sales Professional. I told them about the ability to use Microsoft Word to analyse their document for them and that I had simple methods for resolving the issue.

"I know about that", said the Sales Professional, *"But the problem is that it puts blue lines throughout my document"*.

I left the Sales Professional and went to the nearest wall to begin banging my head.

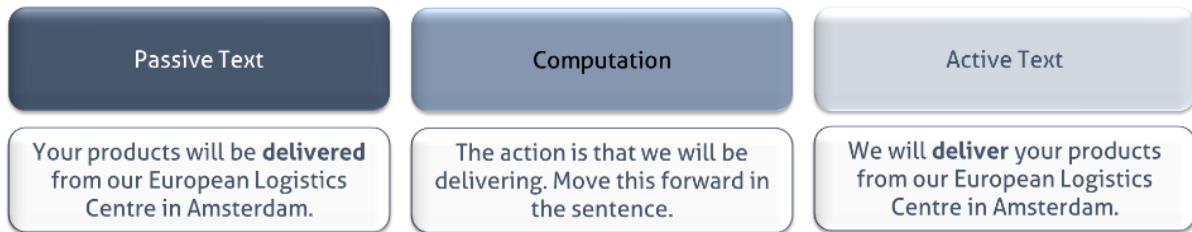
The characteristics of a Passive sentences is within the construction, which is (noun) (verb phrase) by (noun). This results in the relegation of the true subject to the end of the sentence.

If you find this explanation a bit academic and complicated, do not worry. There is a simple test for passive text.

If the sentence has words in the past tense (ending in "ed") and it is not about the past, then it is passive text that you wish to change. To change this to active text, all you need to do is find the true subject its prominence in the sentence. I call this the focal point. All I do is move the focal point to the beginning of the sentence

Example of changing passive to active text

"The driving test is scored according to a set of rules". The focal point is that there are the rules, so bring this forward in the sentence. *"Using a set of rules, we score the driving text."*



Changing passive text to active is a simple process that significantly improves the readability of your proposal.

There is a place for passive text. It is the overuse that makes your buyers weary.

There are times when you want to use the passive tense. This should be when:

- ⊞ There is no focal point to the sentence.
- ⊞ When the active text is too blunt or direct.
- ⊞ When you are writing about the past.
- ⊞ Positioning known information.
- ⊞ When you need to talk about what has happened in the past.
- ⊞ When you want to emphasise the person or thing acted on.

2.5 SUPPORT TEXT WITH GRAPHICS


Half the population find it easier to gain information from graphics rather than text. So your key messages need to be graphical and textual.



You can expect that your Content Writers are going to be competent in using Microsoft Word. However, this may not be true for graphics programmes. Often, they write long text articles that could be easier to understand as a graphic.

Bid teams try to retrofit graphics into a document. Even when they achieve this, the graphics and text can be clunky, and do not connect as well as you would like.

Soon after birth, we were able to see images and quick we were able to compute these. However, it took us time to learn to read. Reading is a learned behaviour. When we read something, we need to compute it in our brain to gain the message. We process the image far faster.

We use this knowledge in day to day life. We all know this sign means turn left . It does not need the words. The use of words would require extra interpretation and that would reduce our ability to watch the road. It could result in more traffic accidents.



Graphics catch the buyer's eyes. They are a good method for ensuring that the buyer is going to interpret our key messages and remain active in their reading. Newspapers and magazines use this approach to keep their buyers reading. Consumer goods companies use this as well, to draw us towards their products and away from the competition.

Graphics are immensely powerful tools for our proposals, and we need to deploy them in a suitable manner.

We need to achieve effective graphics that enhances our text. We also need effective text that enhances our graphics. They need to be symbiotic, so if the buyer looks at the graphic first, our words support it. If they read first, then the graphical interpretation supports the words.

The best approach is to create the graphics first. By doing so, we better understand the message we wish to portray and can write more compelling and supportive text. Our words should lead the buyer through the graphic and understand its significance.

Given that a Content Writer may not feel comfortable in creating graphics using their PC. Let them create it on paper, they do not need to be perfect or professional. If they can create

an image that we can understand, sometimes after a conversation, someone else in our team can compute it into the graphic.

Your buyer's reading style also considers the quantity of graphical representations that aid them to understand your messages. You may find that your customer uses graphics in their internal documents. This as a pointer for the graphics you need to include in your proposal. You can calibrate the **Alchemy Proposal Toolkit** to reflect the graphical content you want.

The customer is graphical

I took over the bid management of a major deal. It was a "must win" for the company and they had put the "A team" onto it. All was going well in the early rounds and we were leading at the final down-select, where we were competing against the incumbent supplier.

Then messages started to filter through, first to the bid team and then to the Sales Director. We had slipped into 2nd place. Our solution seemed more complex and we seemed more difficult to deal with.





I did not know the customer well, so I did my own research. All their internal documentation was very graphical. Their process charts looked like cartoon strips. All their documents were short. Their offices had pictures and posters on all the walls.

I then looked at our last response and it was 250 pages with hardly a graphic in it. I tried to explain this to the bid team, but they were not yet even able to consider that they were not winning. We had 3 weeks to turn around our final proposal. There would not be time to get the team to change. I left them to create the content, using storyboards but without making them create loads of new graphics.

In a separate room, I brought in a Graphic Designer and we sat together with the Sales Professional. We reviewed the text as a team. I used my writing skills to reduce the amount of text, with the Graphic Designer producing a multitude of graphics. The Sales Professional then reviewed the results and lifted the sales messages.

We sent our proposal in and then told the bid team what we had done. They were not happy, feeling that we had insulted their work. However, we won the deal.

Bid Alchemy recommend the following measurement. You should tailor to meet the customer's reading style. Each of the four elements must be visible within all proposals.

	<p>One Key Graphic for each Key Message (Benefit Statement)</p> <p>You need to support each key message within your proposal with a graphical representation.</p> <p>You should aim for at least one key graphic within each section of your proposal and more within your executive summary.</p> <p>You should present your Value Proposition graphically as well.</p>
	<p>Use Supporting graphics to lift the value of your Proposition.</p> <p>Use a graphic when you are trying to explain an aspect of your proposition.</p> <p>Ensure all discriminators also have a graphical representation.</p> <p>Use graphical representations for processes, timelines, and workflows.</p> <p>You should have one key or supporting graphic every 2-3 pages of your proposal and every page of your executive summary unless you have made an assertive decision to deploy less.</p>
	<p>Turn lists into graphical representations</p> <p>To reduce the number of lists within your proposal, convert to tables or make them into pictures.</p> <p>Use graphical elements within your list. For example, if you are listing benefits, include a "tick" ✓ after each one.</p>
	<p>Use Callouts to increase your customer's interest</p> <p>Use callouts to give additional supporting information and to break up large chunks of text.</p> <p>Callouts can be textual, graphical or a mix of both.</p> <p>They should be smaller than key or supporting graphics.</p>

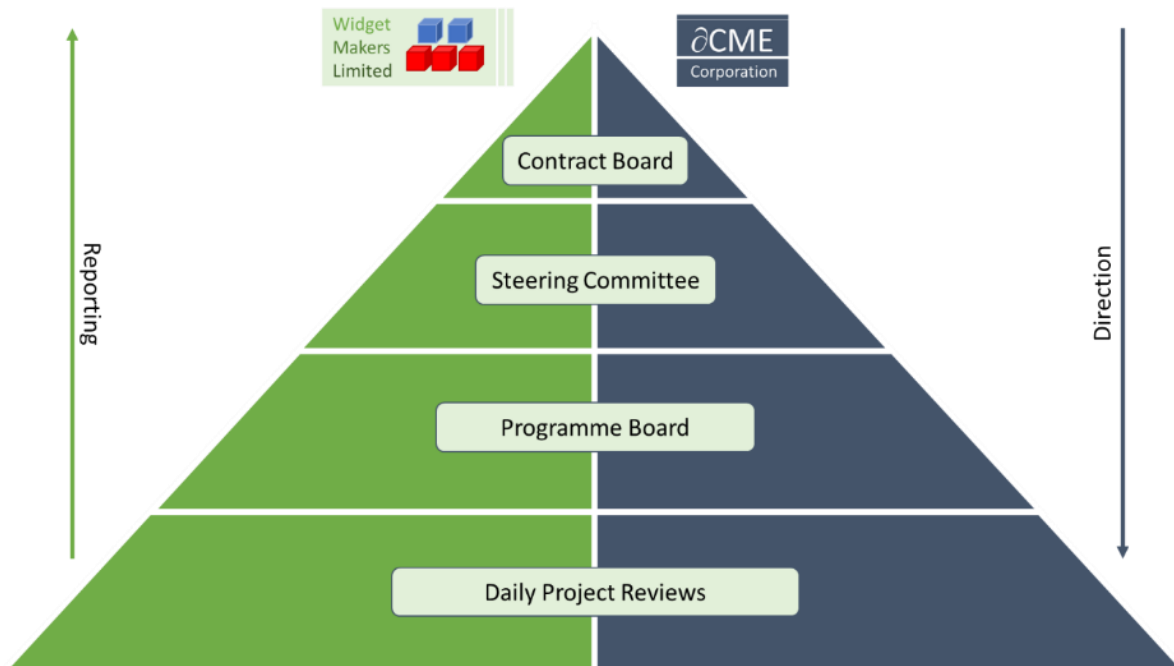
2.5.1 KEY GRAPHICS.

Key graphics are those that present a key message within your proposal. These should depict the benefit that you wish the customer to understand. These should be page width and require an Action Caption.

The Action Caption is the message you place under the graphic. Shipley Associates, publishers of “The Shipley Proposal Guide”, talk about the risk of “Horse” Action Captions. In their training course, they show a picture of a horse and underneath it is the caption “A horse”. Anyone who looks at the picture knows it is a horse, so why do we need to say it? The Action Caption is your opportunity to play the message that you wish the graphic to portray.

You can see good examples of Action Captions in newspapers, every day. When the person reads it, they should mentally nod in agreement with what it says and be intrigued to read on.

Example of a key graphic



Our proven governance model enables strong shared management of the project, whilst ensuring that we efficiently resolve issues and problems.

The Action Caption depicts what the supplier believes is a strength within their proposition. It is the message they want the customer to go away with. The horse caption would be “*Our Governance Model*”

There is often debate on whether we should number graphics. If you select to use a numbering regime, ensure that you use this on all key and supporting graphics and include a graphics content page.

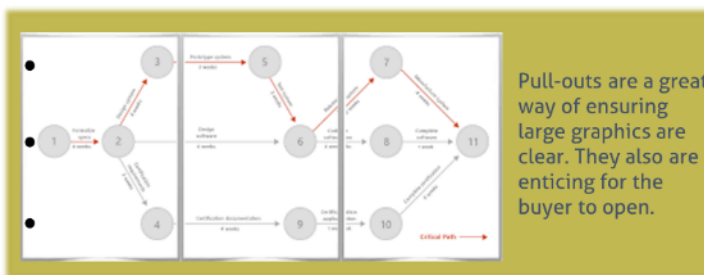
2.5.2 SUPPORTING GRAPHICS

Supporting graphics are those that support the customer’s understanding of your proposal. They are also valuable to aid the understanding of timelines, workflows, organisation charts and processes, as well as depicting elements of your products and services.

Each supporting graphic needs an Action Caption.

Supporting graphics do not need to be page width but ensure that they are easy to read.

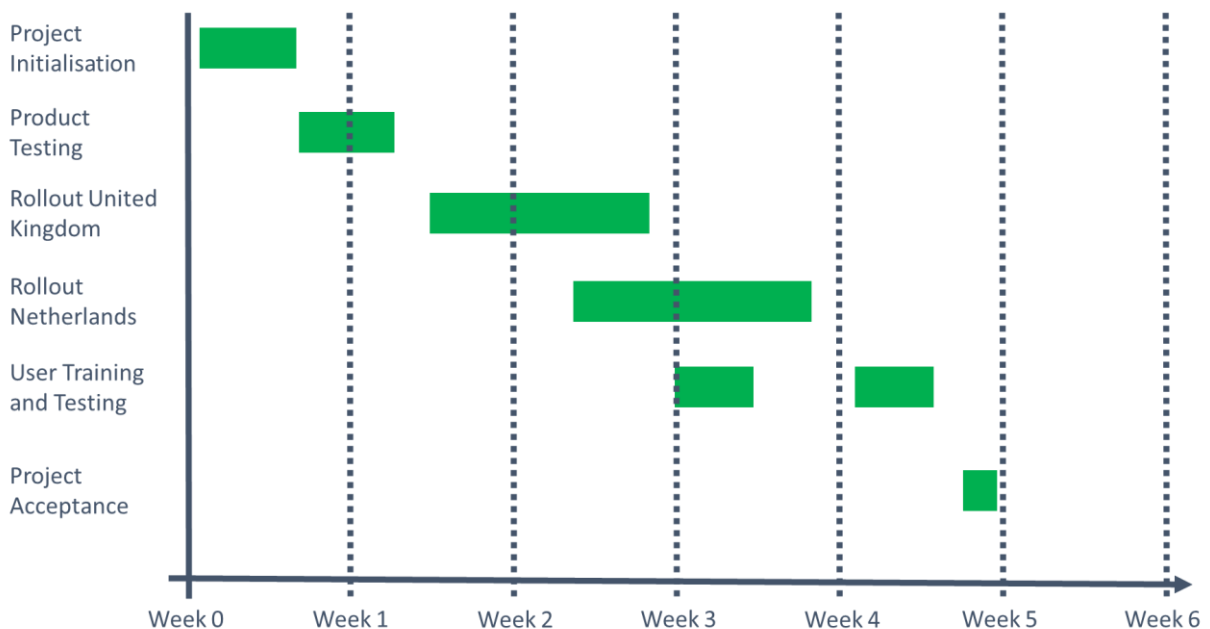
When you wish to depict a project plan, create it as graphics rather than copying and pasting from the project management software. Often the reduction in size of a project plan



make them unreadable. If you do need to include a large and complex plan, in physical proposals, print it over more than one page. You can attach these together, as a pull-out.

If you are showing an organisation chart, I recommend you include photos of the people within it. This makes it far more personable. Ensure that the photos are the professional image you wish to depict.

Example of a supporting graphic



We are confident in delivering the programme in less than your 6-week requirement. Your products have already undergone standard testing for reliability.

2.5.3 GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF LISTS

We discussed the value of lists to make your proposal easier to understand. Overuse can make your proposal seem less professional than you want. You can convert a table into a graphical representation. This also enables you to introduce more colour into your proposal and to accentuate the messages you are wanting to depict. The simplest approach is to add a graphical element to your list.

Example of converting a list to be more graphical

<p>By selecting us, you will get:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☰ 20% reduction to your current contract ☰ 2% reduction per year through continuous improvements ☰ Products renewed every 3 year ☰ Flexibility to increase or reduce Service Levels on an annual basis 	⇒	<p>By selecting us, you will get:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☰ 20% reduction to your current contract ✓ ☰ 2% reduction per year through continuous improvements ✓ ☰ Products renewed every 3 year ✓ ☰ Flexibility to increase or reduce Service Levels on an annual basis ✓
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However, it is quite easy to convert a list into a table.

Example of converting a list into a table

<p>By selecting us, you will get:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☰ 20% reduction to your current contract ☰ 2% reduction per year through continuous improvements ☰ Products renewed every 3 year ☰ Flexibility to increase or reduce Service Levels on an annual basis 					
<p>By selecting us, you will get:</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☰ 20% reduction to your current contract </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☰ 2% reduction per year through continuous improvements </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☰ Products renewed every 3 years </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☰ Flexibility to increase or reduce Service Levels on an annual basis </td> </tr> </table>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☰ 20% reduction to your current contract 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☰ 2% reduction per year through continuous improvements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☰ Products renewed every 3 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☰ Flexibility to increase or reduce Service Levels on an annual basis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☰ 20% reduction to your current contract 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☰ 2% reduction per year through continuous improvements 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☰ Products renewed every 3 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☰ Flexibility to increase or reduce Service Levels on an annual basis 				

How to improve the quality of your proposal.

The approach that will make the greatest impact is to make your message graphical. You may wish to do this alone with a list.

Example of Graphical representation of a list

By selecting us, you will get:

- ☰ 20% reduction to your current contract
- ☰ 2% reduction per year through continuous improvements
- ☰ Products renewed every 3 year
- ☰ Flexibility to increase or reduce Service Levels on an annual basis



If you have access to a Graphic Designer or have one of your team who excels in creating graphics, you should ask them to interpret your lists into graphical representations.

2.5.4 USING CALLOUTS TO BREAK UP TEXT AND ACCENTUATE YOUR MESSAGES

Callouts are small graphics or text within graphic boxes that you can position within your document. I have used them within this document.

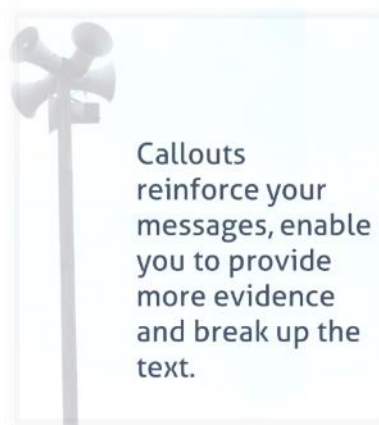
They catch the buyer's eye and can break-up large sections of text. When we see a page full of text, sub-consciously we believe we have a hard job in front of us. By including callouts, we enable the buyer's brain to see 'stopping off' points and this increases the possibility that they will read rather than scan.

Callouts should be a maximum of one sentence and not so small that they are difficult to read. They should be placed within the relevant section, chapter, or page. They should also have a consistent look and style.

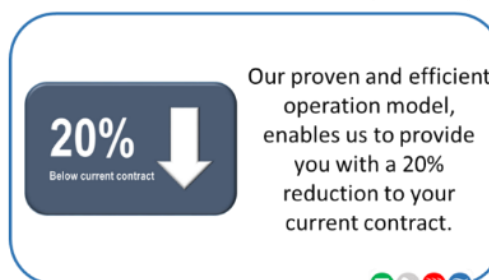
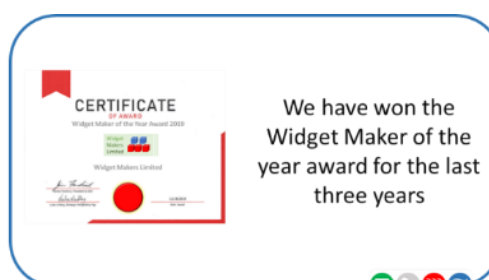
Your Proposal Manager should manage the positioning of callouts to ensure that they keep a professional look to the page.

Good uses of callouts that will add weight to your proposal include:

- ➊ Giving evidence of your industry standing, such as certificates and awards
- ➋ As evidence of your performance, such as customer quotes or facts from similar contracts
- ➌ To reinforce a key fact, such as performance levels, savings, or advantages over competitors
- ➍ As a visual mirror to a fact or message within that page.



Examples of callouts



2.5.5 GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF GRAPHICS

- ☰ Use a consistent pallet, style, and font set for all your graphical representations
- ☰ If you have access to a graphics designer or specialist, use them
- ☰ Use photographs where possible, especially when the subject is the people involved in the contract
- ☰ Do not use customer photographs, graphics, or logo without their permission
- ☰ If you use clipart, ensure that it is professional and ideally have a set designed for your organisation
- ☰ Ensure you have copyright permission for photographs or graphics you are importing into your proposal
- ☰ Design the first drafts of your key are supporting graphics before you write

2.6 USE POSITIVE WORDS

Negative words lead the reader to negative thinking. Positive words supports the reader to think positively.

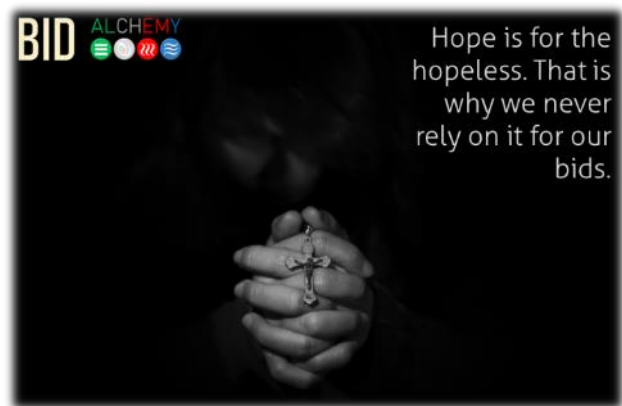


When we speak, we often use negative words when we do not want to give a negative impression. It is one of the idiosyncrasies of the English Language. This usage falls into our writing and can subconsciously make the buyer think negatively about our proposal.

Research has shown that negative text, reduces the mood of the buyer, whilst positive text has the opposite effect. If our buyers are in a positive mind-set then they will evaluate our response higher than if they are not.

Through practice of spotting these negative words and rectifying it in your writing, enables you to lift the positive nature of your proposal.

There are various type of negative words and phrases that slip into our proposals, these include:



- ☰ Self-defeating words. Where we use words that make it sound like we will fail. *“The solution will not be operational until”*
- ☰ False-negatives words. Where we use a negative word to stand for a positive fact. *“Not only will we deliver by your deadline, we plan to be operational 2 weeks early.”*
- ☰ Assuming the worst. Where we write about the failure rather than the challenges. *“If you do not provide the order by Tuesday, we cannot deliver by Friday.”*
- ☰ Assigning blame. Where we make it sound like we are blaming others for failure. *“If XwhyZ are not able to provide the products by Tuesday, we will not be able to meet your deadline.”*
- ☰ Double negative. These are where we include two negatives within a sentence. This is this is a result of bad English structure.

Your proposal needs to be a positive document, if it is not, then why are your proposing it? It is important that, at a review, you change these negatives to the positive that they were meant to be.

The table, on the following pages, shows negative words creep into proposals.

How to improve the quality of your proposal.

Word	Negative sentence	Positive sentence
Cannot	We cannot deliver the goods on time unless we receive an order by Tuesday.	We will deliver the goods on time, on receipt of an order by Tuesday,
Do not	We do not supply faulty goods to our customer due to our thorough testing regime.	Our thorough testing regime means that all customers receive dependable, working goods.
Impossible	It is impossible to predict the traffic, so cannot commit to goods arriving by 5pm.	We will make all efforts to ensure that you receive your goods by 5pm.
Not	We will not fail in delivering the goods on time.	We will deliver the goods on time.
Not Only	Not only will we deliver the goods on time, we expect you will receive them early.	We will deliver the goods on time and aim for you to receive them early.
Never	We will never deliver late.	We will always deliver on time.
Neither	We will neither deliver late nor provide goods that fail.	We will always deliver on time and provide goods that work.
Have not	We have not had time to review the data list but will do so in the next week.	We will review the data list in the next week.
None	None of our products will fail on arrival.	All our products will work on arrival.
Should not	It should not be possible for us to deliver late.	We will deliver on time.
Would not	It would not be possible to deliver on a weekend.	We will deliver on any weekday.
But	We could deliver at the weekend, but this will incur an added cost.	We will deliver at the weekend for an added cost.
Could	We could deliver on Tuesday if you wish.	We will deliver on Tuesday if you wish.
Problem	Rollout plans can be a problem due to the number of locations and time-restrictions.	The number of locations and time-restrictions are challenges we consider within our rollout plan.
Should	We should be able to deliver on Sundays.	We deliver on Sundays.
Believe	We believe that the best approach is....	The best approach is....
Think	We think the best approach is....	The best approach is.
Mistake	It would be a mistake to assume that there will not be issues during the project.	We assume there will be issues during the project.
Feel	We feel that the best approach is....	The best approach is....
Understand	We understand you need for deliveries before Sunday.	You need the deliveries before Sunday.
Hope	We hope you find this approach acceptable.	Our approach is....
Strive	We will strive to meet all the requirements.	We will meet all the requirements.

How to improve the quality of your proposal.

Word	Negative sentence	Positive sentence
Try	We will try to install all the products to the timescales.	We will install all the products to the timescales.
Attempt	We will attempt to delivery by Tuesday.	We will deliver by Tuesday,
Desire	It is our desire to meet all your requirements.	We will meet all your requirements.



There are times when you do need to use negative text in your proposal. This will only be when you are trying to make a strong statement. For instance, when you wish to set the customer's mind to something not being possible or sensible. Apart, from those instances, use positive words and phrases.

2.7 KEEP CROSS-REFERENCING TO A MINIMUM.

To reduce cross-references, referred to appendix 3.....



Let me tell you a secret about our proposals. Our customers do not read appendices or articles that we cross-reference. OK, this is not a fact in all cases, but it is the right mind-set to have.

My largest proposal

I once delivered ¼ metric ton of paper to a customer. This was the largest proposal; I have ever worked on. We did need to send 10 copies of the proposal, but still you can see this was a hefty piece of work.

The challenge was that the customer asked for things like a training plan for each of the employees that would transfer from their organisation to ours. There were over 1,000 people transferring, so about 5,000 pages of text just to cover that. We also had to include full copies of each process and procedure that would work in the provision of the service. Now you know how long a process document can be.

We have a proposal of about 750 pages with thousands of pages of appendices. All compliant and all good quality. We won the deal.

After winning, the customer admitted they never reviewed or evaluated the appendices, however they were very thankful for the supply of folders that they could reuse.

Cross-referencing can create a document look lazy. We are asking the buyers to undertake more work in searching for information. There is a good chance that they do not have time for this extra work and so we get a lower evaluation score than we deserve.

The best approach is to start your proposal creation with the mind-set that you will not use any cross-referencing and will not have any appendices. It then becomes an assertive decision when you need to do it. There are times when you do need to cross reference or include appendices, but this is far less that I often see in proposals.



The best proposals do not require the customer to search for information.

The Bid Alchemy approach to cross-referencing is:

1.	Ensure that each section of the proposal is free-standing. Do not cross-reference between sections. Often, a group of buyers review your proposal. Each may only have the sections they need for evaluation. Do not expect them to go searching around the office for other sections.
2.	Do not only include important information within an appendix. The buyers may not evaluate this valuable information. For example, <i>"To see the cost savings we will deliver, please read appendix 1"</i>
3.	Explain to the buyer the benefit that they will gain from the reference material. If they do not seek the reference, at least they can see the benefit you deliver. For example, <i>"Through this approach we will deliver a 20% cost-savings. For the full break-down please see appendix 2."</i>
4.	Summarise the information in the appendix, so that the customer can understand it, should they not read the appendix. For example, <i>"We apply contingency to each stage of the project to ensure that you can be confident we will deliver on time. Unused contingency provides us with the opportunity to bring forward the delivery date, with your approval. For the full project plan, please see appendix 3."</i>
5.	Do not cross-reference in your response to a customer question. You will certainly lose evaluation scores. For example, <i>"Do you provide your products in red? "Please see appendix 4 for our colour chart"</i> .
6.	When using Appendices, ensure that you include them within your table of contents.

The Government Reviewer

Early in my career, I once had the opportunity to talk with a member of the Civil Service whose job was to review the proposals submitted to Government Departments and to ensure their evaluation was fair. He did not do this alone and had a team to support him. He said to me, *"Martin, you must understand, I see lots of proposals and all I actually read is the executive summaries. My team review the documents and the evaluation scores. Every day, I take the executive summaries for one bid with me for the journey home, usually this is 4 or 5 documents. I have a 30-minute train journey and I finish when the train arrives at my stop."*

I learnt so much from this. All the information must be available to him within that document. It must hold his attention and be a joy to read. It should stand out, so he reads it first.

2.7.1 PUNCTUATION AND GRAMMAR

Poor punctuation and grammar can lead to misunderstanding by the reader and can make your proposal look unprofessional.



Our use of punctuation and grammar can differ depending on the education system and our level of education. If you have 10 Content Writers working on your proposal, it can have different styles and rules. Arguments can break out within bid teams on the correct usage of commas and whether there should be one or two carriage returns at the end of a paragraph. People can get very particular around this subject.

You should provide each Content Writer with a style guide to explain the punctuation and grammar rules that they should use. However, do not expect them to apply this all the time. It is important that you allow time, at the end of proposal construction, for one person to edit the document into a common reading style.

There are good books and learning events around this subject, so I will not try and write one into this guide. As someone, who did not excel at school, I am not the best person to do so. Bid Alchemy recommend turning on and calibrating the proofing tool, in Microsoft Word.

I do use the following advice to keep myself on track.



Punctuation is the use of spacing, signs, and devices as aid the reading in understanding our proposal.

Grammar is the system and structure of language consisting of syntax and morphology and semantics.

<p>FULL STOP .</p>	<p>Indicates the end of a sentence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no need for a full stop in peoples' name Headings in your proposal do not need full stops. Bullet Points do not need full stops unless each bullet point is a sentence. Sentences that end with a web address should not include a full stop.
<p>COMMA ,</p>	<p>A separator between parts of a sentence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be sparing with their usage. A comma every few words prevents the buyer's understanding. A pair of commas at the start and end of a statement cordons off information that is an aside, explanation or addition.
<p>COLON :</p>	<p>To introduce supporting information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It makes an announcement. For example, <i>Widget Pro: Our award-winning product.</i> It introduces a list.
<p>SEMICOLON ;</p>	<p>To run on two connected sentences, where a comma is not strong enough. Use semicolon:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To sustain a pause in the sentence without breaking the flow. To separate a list, especially when the list has commas within the text.
<p>DASH -</p>	<p>To show an aside, explanation or addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> They can also add emphasis: 20% below todays cost – lowest price. Use in pairs to draw attention at the start and end of a phrase. Use with a space either side of the dash.
<p>SQUARE BRACKETS []</p>	<p>Shows that the text within does not belong to the document or quotation You include it clarity. For example, <i>'We [Acme Corporation] are delighted with the service'.</i></p>

BRACKETS	()	Surround an aside, explanation or addition. Like the dash.
CAPITALS	A	Shows the start of a sentence, paragraph or heading. Use sparingly, especially within sentences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use for names and acronyms
HYPHEN	-	Makes a links between subjects (computer-based training): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally used between an adjective and a noun. Do not use when one of the words is a verb.
APOSTROPHE	'	To show ownership or for contraction of words: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use to show ownership 'the customer's responsibility'. Be wary of using it for contraction. 'It is' is more professional than 'It's'.
ELIPSES	...	Use to show information is missing or to introduce suspense: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should always be three full stops. Should have a space before and after, unless followed by a quotation mark.
QUOTATION MARKS	“ ”	To show the opening and closing of direct speech: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The comma should follow the final quotation mark. You can use it to clothe a word to show irony. We do not recommend this usage within proposals.
EXCLAMATION MARK	!	To show surprise, shock, or dismay. I suggest that you do not use exclamation marks within proposals.
QUESTION MARK	?	Use to show that you are asking a question. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use only when necessary in a proposal – we should not be asking questions. Bracketed (?) can show that you have doubts in a statement. This is informal and we should not use it in this manner in proposals.

3. THE CORE ALCHEMY COMPONENTS OF YOUR PROPOSAL

So far in this guide, we look at ways of improving the quality of your text and graphics to increase the readability of your document. We need a way of making this systematic within our proposal creation. Bid Alchemy supply the 8 Attributes of a high-quality proposal. Each attribute consists of components. You can consider these the subjects that enable you to satisfy that attribute. Each component consists of elements. These are the small things that, when you do them right, will lift the quality of your proposal.

The **Alchemy Proposal Toolkit** uses this approach to enable you to evaluate the quality of your proposal and show actions you can undertake to lift it. BY doing so, you are increasing your chance of winning the deal.



To send your best proposal, you need to ensure that you have considered each of the eight attributes.

Bid Alchemy provide an overview of each of these components within the following sub-chapters.

3.1 THE CONFORMANT ATTRIBUTE

Your proposal conforms to the customer requirements.

This is a basic attribute, but it is easy to overlook. Disqualification can happen when the proposal is not conformant with the customer's rules.

3.1.1 CUSTOMER CONFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS

In requirement documents, the customer may list a series of requirements for your proposal. This may include things like:

- Page count. The customer may express a page or word count for each question or the proposal in its entirety.
- Format. They may inform you that they will the proposal to be in a specific font and they may require the document to be in a PDF, RTF, or word compliant format. They may also specify that the proposal may not have graphics.
- Naming Convention. The customer may specify the heading titles and the name of your submission.
- Layout. The proposal may need to be in a specific layout, both in size of margins and in the contents list.



3.1.2 PROVIDING COMPLETE ANSWERS

You need to consider whether you are answering all the customer's question. Responses may partially answer or do not say that they meet the requirement.

Example of not answering the customer's question

“Can you provide your products in red and can we select other colours if required?”

“Yes, we can provide our products in red”. ✗

“Yes, we can provide our products in 9 standard colours,” ✗

“Yes, we can provide our products in red and provide the options of 9 colours to select from.” ✓

“Will you provide 200 products in red by Tuesday?”

“Yes, we will provide 200 products by Tuesday.” ✗

“Yes, we will provide 200 red products.” ✗

“Yes, we will provide the products in red by Tuesday.” ✗

“Yes, we will provide 200 red products by Tuesday.” ✓

In the first example, the customer asks more than one question when they seem to be asking one. It is important to ensure that we answer both questions to achieve the highest score.

The second answer shows the customer having three conditions within their question; the colour red, need 200 products and needing them by Tuesday. We must say that we meet each of these conditions to be conformant to their requirements.

3.1.3 CONFORMS TO THE CUSTOMER'S REQUIREMENT.

You must show that you understand the customer's requirements and that our proposition is compliant with them. We need to:

- ☑ Make it clear that we are compliant with their requirements. The inclusion of a compliance matrix may help to make this clearer to the customer.
- ☑ Make it clear that we address their needs.
- ☑ If you not compliant, we give a commentary to mitigate it.
- ☑ If the customer is asking the wrong questions, explain this and give an alternative response.
- ☑ Give current evidence of compliance.
- ☑ Show the benefit and value of our response.
- ☑ Benefits are consistent throughout the document.
- ☑ Ensure that any technical or complex responses are easy to understand by all our buyers.
- ☑ Convey our willingness and capability to support the customer in reaching their goals.

3.1.4 EASY FOR THE CUSTOMER TO EVALUATE.

Ensure that the responses and proposal are simple for the customer to evaluate against their criteria. The customer may supply an evaluation score card so that you can see the weighting. All customers need to evaluate each proposal.

- ☑ The proposal is easy to navigate. It is easy for the buyers to find the subjects and responses they are looking for.
- ☑ Each response begins with the key information relating to the customer question.
- ☑ We make it clear that we are compliant in each case.
- ☑ Benefits are clear within all relevant responses.
- ☑ Highlight key information and value within the text.
- ☑ Added value and benefits from our proposition is obvious to the customer.
- ☑ Alternative approaches are clearly apparent to the customer.

3.2 THE CLEAR DOCUMENT ATTRIBUTE

Your proposal is easy to read and understand.

All the buyers will be able to understand our proposition on first reading. To achieve this, you need to apply the following components



- ☰ Sentences and paragraphs are short
- ☰ It is in language the customer will understand. Ideally, to their reading styles
- ☰ It uses the words as we need
- ☰ Active voice throughout
- ☰ Graphical techniques enhance the readability and attractiveness of the document
- ☰ Positive word with no false negative statements
- ☰ Minimal cross-referencing and appendices
- ☰ Reads in one voice. Consistent and correct punctuation and grammar

Other elements that you need to consider are:

- ☰ The structure and flow of each response and the proposal is rational
- ☰ Clear, structured introduction and conclusion for each section
- ☰ It is free from ambiguity, and does not have vague terms or unrequired acronyms and technical jargon
- ☰ No gender stereotypes
- ☰ The tone is positive and confident

3.3 THE ENTICING DOCUMENT ATTRIBUTE

Your proposal must entice the customer to read and keep read it.

The buyers may not be looking forward to spending their day reading a multiple of proposals. We need to ensure that they enjoy reading our proposal and want to evaluate it highly.

For your proposal to be enticing, you need to consider:

- ≡ It is an enjoyable read that did not result in scanning
- ≡ Reading results in learning.
- ≡ A distinctive voice that resonates with the buyers
- ≡ Relevant to the buyers needs and interests
- ≡ Every day, relatable words
- ≡ Intriguing, arousing curiosity and stimulating thought
- ≡ Capable of evoking emotion
- ≡ Credible and believable
- ≡ Gives commitment and risk sharing, measurable milestones, credibility, and reputation
- ≡ Repeats common themes and benefits throughout
- ≡ Action Captions and headings are hooks to read the text



You also need to ensure that there is evidence to support your proposition

- ≡ Credible case studies that are relevant to the customer
- ≡ Independent data, awards and recognition are clear throughout the proposal
- ≡ Facts are relevant to the customer requirement and industry
- ≡ Facts are correct and are verifiable
- ≡ Facts are up to date
- ≡ Persuasive evidence that gives benefits that meets or exceeds the requirements
- ≡ Supporting evidence for partners or sub-contractors.

3.4 THE RECEPTIVE ATTRIBUTE

We need the customer to be receptive to our proposal. This means that, as they read it, they will agree with our rationale and the value we are proposing.

The buyers need to be in agreement with our proposal.



3.4.1 DEMONSTRATES OUR ABILITY TO DELIVER THE CUSTOMER OBJECTIVES

By selecting us, we need the buyers to be confident that, by selecting us, they will achieve the aims.

- ☰ Our proposition clearly shows we will deliver their outcomes
- ☰ Messages clearly depict how we will be meeting their needs
- ☰ Aligns and supports achieving the customer's vision and critical success factors
- ☰ Mitigate any worries or concerns for each buyer
- ☰ Benefits are realistically achievable
- ☰ Tailoring of boilerplate or reusable text to be specific to this opportunity

3.4.2 DEMONSTRATE THAT WE UNDERSTAND THE CUSTOMER

We need to show the customer that we understand their requirement, goals, and vision.

- ☰ Use the customer language, including their acronyms (if necessary) and their words
- ☰ Paraphrase their statements do not copy content
- ☰ Show that we are listening by including customer information
- ☰ Only use the customer's jargon
- ☰ Explain specific terms from our language in a clear manner

3.4.3 WE FOCUS ON THE CUSTOMER

Writing more about ourselves than the customer is a constant risk. To achieve this, in our proposal we need to consider:

- ☰ Mention the customer before we mention ourselves in all sentences
- ☰ Talk about the customer 3 times more than it talks about us
- ☰ Address the customer requirement and achieve their outcomes. We do not include generic boilerplate
- ☰ Cite the benefits the customer will achieve and only include features if we know that they will be of interest to the customer and lift the evaluation score
- ☰ Link the customer's vision to our own.
- ☰ Articulate the customer's vision in our own words and how our proposition is supportive
- ☰ Address issues and need within our responses

3.5 THE GRAPHICAL ATTRIBUTE

We need to ensure that the document has the right graphical content to increase the readability and support the customer understanding our messages.

Graphics are powerful in providing understanding and giving rise to emotions



3.5.1 KEY AND SUPPORTING GRAPHICS

- ☰ One key graphic for each benefit statement
- ☰ Supporting graphics that aid the understanding of complex text and subjects
- ☰ At least one key or supporting graphic for every two pages of the proposal
- ☰ Similar professional style, using the same palette and fonts
- ☰ Simple to understand and portray the right message without need to read the text. You could explain the graphic within 10 seconds of looking at it
- ☰ Minimal textual content
- ☰ Key graphics are page width and all key and supporting graphics should be easy to see
- ☰ Orientation is correct for easy comprehension
- ☰ Action Captions that give a positive message and hook the buyer to read
- ☰ If using graphic numbering, a list of figures at the beginning of the proposal, after the table of contents

3.5.2 LISTS AND TABLE

It is easy for a buyer to scan over lists and tables. They must be enticing so that the buyers review them.

- ☰ Same styling, palette, and fonts throughout the proposal
- ☰ Bullet points should not have a full-stop at the end
- ☰ Bullets should be colourful
- ☰ Lists do not go over one page and can be in two columns
- ☰ Only use lists when appropriate
- ☰ Deploy graphical elements to lists, (such as ticks) to increase their attractiveness
- ☰ Tables need to have column headers that make the content obvious
- ☰ If a table breaks across a page, ensure that the headings are visible on each page
- ☰ Convert tables into graphics
- ☰ If numbering tables include a list of tables after the table of contents

3.5.3 CALLOUTS

- ☰ Support benefit statements
- ☰ More evidence, such as customer quotes, awards, and independent research
- ☰ Similar style, palette, and font
- ☰ Text and image easy to read and view
- ☰ Within the right section or chapter
- ☰ All sections and chapters have callouts (as relevant)
- ☰ Break up large sections of text
- ☰ Portray us and our proposition in a positive light

3.5.4 GENERAL RULES

- ☰ Tailor stock graphics to the proposal style
- ☰ Stock photographs portray the right professional image
- ☰ All photographs are of a high resolution
- ☰ Copyright or permission to use photographs, logos, and customer images
- ☰ Use photographs showing people, with their permission

3.6 THE DESIGN ATTRIBUTE

We want our proposal to present a professional image and to be the one that the buyers want to read first. Research shows that the first proposal gets a higher evaluation score. It is a marker against the proposals read afterwards.

3.6.1 COVER ART

- ☰ Professional graphics of a high resolution and ideally photographic
- ☰ Grabs attention and sets the mind thinking
- ☰ relevant to the opportunity and the message or vision
- ☰ Stands for the customer and connects
- ☰ Supporting strap line that acts as a hook to read the proposal
- ☰ Include logos (with permission)
- ☰ Visible correct title
- ☰ Depict customer reference number
- ☰ Style, palate, and font sets are compatible with those in the proposal.



3.6.2 PAGE LAYOUT

- ☰ Page size is correct for the customer (e.g. A4 for most UK customers)
- ☰ Orientation enables readability
- ☰ Text and graphics do not spill over the page
- ☰ Headings and subheadings do not start in the bottom third of the page
- ☰ Page breaks/column breaks to avoid widow/orphan text
- ☰ Tailor header/footer to the customer and their requirements
- ☰ Depicts page numbering, any copyright statement, and any commercial statement
- ☰ Consistent style page design features
- ☰ Font is set for left justification only and has a ragged edge
- ☰ Font sets are available so that the formatting will look the same
- ☰ Innovation with the layout to entice the customer
- ☰ Blow-outs for graphics too large for single page
- ☰ A contents page with graphic and table lists, if relevant
- ☰ Use the customer's numbering convention

3.6.3 WHITE SPACE

- ☰ Third of the page is white space.
- ☰ The margins are wide enough to enable reading of all text when the document is in a folder and to allow the customer space to make comments
- ☰ White space emphasises graphical elements.
- ☰ All headings are closer to the texts than any other graphical elements
- ☰ All captions are closer to the graphical elements than relevant text

3.6.4 CUSTOMER BRANDING

- ☰ Connects to the customer, through use of a combination of branding
- ☰ Colours stands for the customer's and your palates
- ☰ Graphical style is representative of the customer's documents.

3.6.5 HEADINGS

- ☰ Consistent use of headings throughout the document that indicate the content and message of the section or subsection.
- ☰ Headings provide a message that hooks the customer into reading the text
- ☰ Different font sizes and appearance to indicate different levels of sub-headings
- ☰ Sub-heading title must not be in a smaller font that the standard text size

3.7 THE BUSINESS CASE ATTRIBUTE

Our proposal must meet and ideally better, the business case of the customer. For any procurement, the customer will have undertaken some level of business case development and justification.

The procurement is to enable them to improve performance. We must convince the customer that our proposition will achieve their business case to win.

This does involve a lot of hard and smart thinking. If we do not do this, we are relying on the customer.



3.7.1 VALUE PROPOSITION

The value proposition is our response to the customer's business case. It is a sharp message that is easy to remember and repeat. For those who studied the old-school of sales, it is like an elevator speech. It is a paragraph of text that will hook the customer into wanting to find out more.

For a value proposition to be effective, it depicts the following attributes

- ≡ Clear. All buyers get the same message
- ≡ Convincing. It is persuasive and strong
- ≡ Rational. It makes sense, the steps link together to arrive at the benefit
- ≡ Value. Directly connected to the business case. It should be greater value than the returns the customer is looking for
- ≡ Believable. In the buyers' minds it is factual as it has evidence to support it
- ≡ Customer's Language. Words and style that matches the customer's reading style
- ≡ Appealing. The customer will like it when they read it
- ≡ Competitive. The competitors cannot say the same or better
- ≡ Graphical. A graphic reinforces the message
- ≡ Elements of Benefits. It has elements of the key messages
- ≡ Memorable. The buyers can quote it

3.7.2 WORRIES AND CONCERNS

These are often called Hot Buttons. They are the unstated worries and concerns of the buyers. Think of these as the things that can keep the buyer awake at night. For example, if we know that one buyer has worries about fast rollout plans, we need to build in comfort to our proposal that our rollout plan will not fail.

- ☰ Evidence that we know and respond to the buyer's worries and concerns through messages and callouts
- ☰ Evidence that will allay the fear of the customer
- ☰ Rational approach to resolving the buyer's worries and concerns
- ☰ Highlight our strengths to reduce the impact of the worries and concerns
- ☰ Realistic and achievable in the buyer's mindset

3.7.3 WHY US

- ☰ Strong evidence to why the customer should select us
- ☰ Case studies, testimonials, independent research, and awards to support the customer in making the right decision
- ☰ Evident that we meet their requirements
- ☰ Graphical representations of our products, services, and performance
- ☰ Explains why we are the best choice through how we operate
- ☰ Highlights what only we can do or that we do best (discriminators)

3.8 THE COMPETITIVE ATTRIBUTE

Our proposal can be good, but that will not win us the deal, if the competitor has a better proposal and proposition.

We need to ensure that the customer, views our proposal as a better match to their requirements than the competition. We do not do this by stating the failures of the competition, but we aim to achieve it by ensuring that the customer can see deficiencies in the competition through our statements and strengths.



3.8.1 BENEFIT STATEMENTS OR KEY MESSAGES

These should be similar in approach to the value proposition. Think of these messages as mini-value propositions.

- ☰ Clear. All buyers get the same message
- ☰ Convincing. It is persuasive and strong
- ☰ Rational. It makes sense, the steps link together to arrive at the benefit
- ☰ Value. Directly connects to the business case.
- ☰ Believable. In the buyers' minds it is factual as it has evidence to support it
- ☰ Customer's Language. Words and style that matches the customer's reading style
- ☰ Relevant. It is a benefit that the customer values
- ☰ Appealing. The customer will like it when they read it
- ☰ Competitive. The competitors cannot say the same or better
- ☰ Graphical. A graphic reinforces the message
- ☰ Repeated. Shown on more than one occasion
- ☰ Memorable. The buyers can quote it

3.8.2 DISCRIMINATORS

- ☰ Evident throughout the proposal
- ☰ Gives confidence that only we can achieve it
- ☰ Supported with evidence
- ☰ Ghosting of competitive weaknesses
- ☰ Specific and defined
- ☰ Relevant to the customer and the requirement
- ☰ Add value to our proposition.

4. LESSONS LEARNT

- ☰ We win when we have the best proposition and the measurably best proposal
- ☰ We can improve our proposal through small changes. Small improvements can make a big difference
- ☰ We will not have time at the end of proposal creation to make all the changes we want, so it is best that we all improve our writing style and start with a common understanding on what we need to write
- ☰ We need to stop and review our proposal at times to ensure that we are on the right path
- ☰ We need a way of agreeing and measuring the quality of our proposal to find ways of improving it, such as the Alchemy Proposal tool
- ☰ We need to write for the customer's reading style and the closer we write to the buyer's reading style, the more compelling our proposal will be
- ☰ We aim to produce a proposal that the customer wants to pick up first and enjoys reading