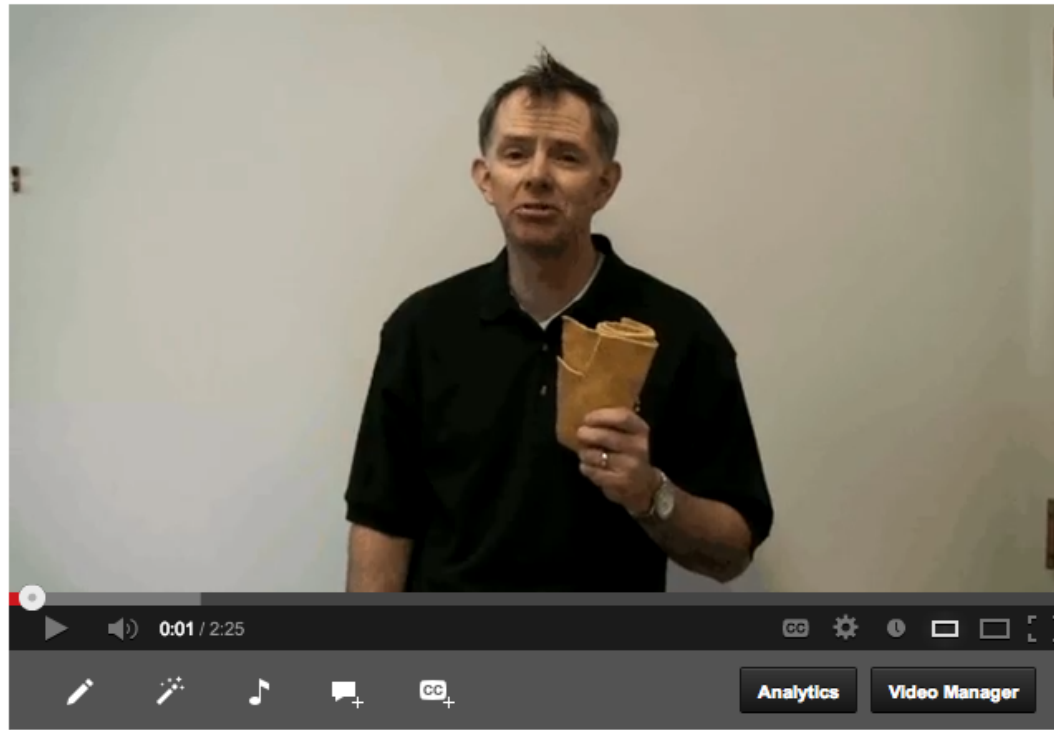# Grant Proposals: How to Write and Argue Effectively

Roger Graves
Professor, English and Film Studies
Director, Writing Across the Curriculum
Associate Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6BMn3Q8jvA

About me, sales, and entrepreneurship

Successful multi-million-dollar baseball hitter gets a hit 1 times out of 4 chances

Overall grant success rates: 1 in 5
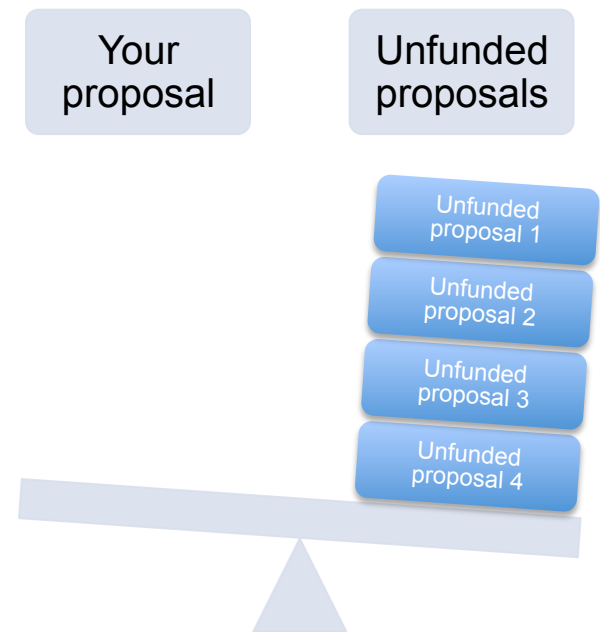
U of A Arts SSHRC success rate for INsight:

~1 in 4

Overall SSHRC success rate:

1 in 5

1. Persistence wins

2. Good isn't good enough: you have to be better than the other good proposals

3. What gives you an edge over the other excellent work being done out there?

Your proposal

Unfunded proposals

Unfunded proposal 1

Unfunded proposal 2

Unfunded proposal 3

Unfunded proposal 4

Moral of the story

Funding applications are derived from the business genre: RFP (requests for proposals)

Opportunity Description:

This Tender is for an Outline Agreement for the provision of all labour, materials and equipment required to provide a means for beneficial use of thickened and dewatered Biosolids in agricultural and non-agricultural lands, along with all associated tasks as per the Scope of Work, for the City of Edmonton Drainage Services Branch.

The Term of the Outline Agreement will be for 1 seasonal period, beginning June 1, 2013 and ending December 31, 2013. The City will have the option to extend the Term, in its sole discretion, for 2 additional 1 year periods. The City may split the award of this Contract between up to 2 Bidders.

Distant relations but still relatives

Objectives

The objectives of the Insight program are to:

- build knowledge and understanding from disciplinary, interdisciplinary and/or cross-sector perspectives through support for the best researchers;
- support new approaches to research on complex and important topics, including those that transcend the capacity of any one scholar, institution or discipline;
- provide a high-quality research training experience for students;
- fund research expertise that relates to societal challenges and opportunities; and
- mobilize research knowledge, to and from academic and non-academic audiences, with the potential to lead to intellectual, cultural, social and economic influence, benefit and impact.

Grant proposals follow this general pattern:

What is the problem?

What solution do you recommend?

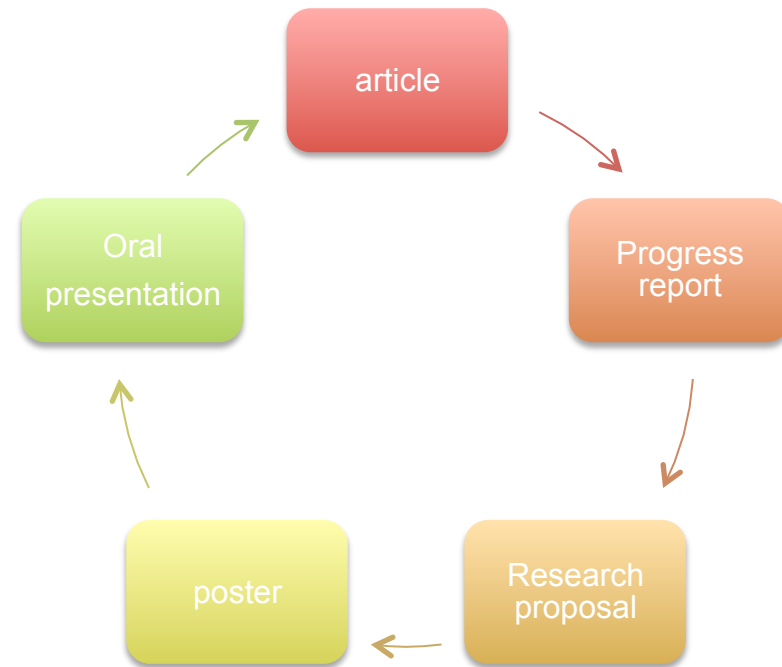What is your implementation schedule?

C. Miller (1984) described genre as a rhetorical action that recurs within a social setting

The sharing of meaning is intersubjective and negotiated through discourse among the group

These shared discourses form into typical types of documents (genres)

Genres typically do not occur alone but instead as part of a set of social actions within a group

The research article is one of a set of genres: a conference presentation, a research grant, research grant reports, peer review documents

Other related documents?

proposal

manuscript

presentation
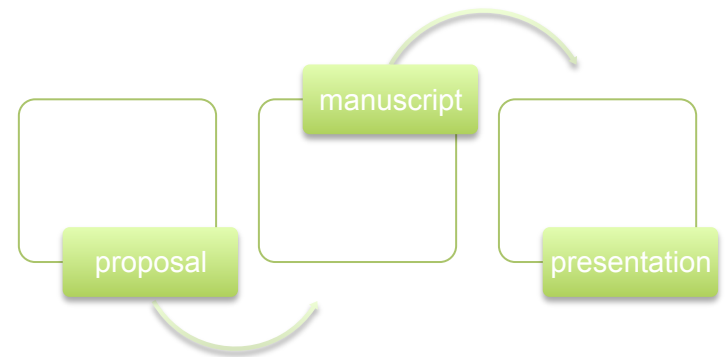
Claim ← **Link** (because) ← **Reason**

↑ **Challenges**

(How, So what, Why?)

↑ **Evidence**

(Data, Statistics, Expert opinion, Visuals, Other studies, etc. [What counts is often discipline-specific])

Claim + stated reason:
The gun registry in Canada has failed to live up to its promise of making women safer **because the kinds of guns used to kill women in domestic violence do not require registration**.

Informal argument structures

- Evidence to support stated reason (Grounds) (facts, data, statistics, testimony, examples)

- Backing = facts, statistics, testimony, examples that support the grounds or assumptions you are working from

- Claim + stated reason rest upon an unstated reason

- Both the stated and unstated reasons rely on shared assumptions of value between the writer and the reader

- Evidence demonstrates the validity of the stated or unstated reasons

- When values are shared, less evidence is needed to convince the reader

Swales (1991) developed the concept of discourse communities to explain the purposes within documents

His concept of rhetorical "moves" within documents—such as "establish a research territory"—leads to one method for establishing the typical purposes or communicative aims for a document.

Discourse communities

Back of the napkin

Exercise 1

Write a one sentence description of your research problem.

Mine:

I propose to use existing and emerging scholarship in gaming, human-computer interaction, writing studies, rhetoric, and natural language understanding to identify the significant aspects of a new online environment for learning to write (a model).

Yours?

"Recently, Alberta has received much media attention because of its massive drawing power for migrants in a context of unprecedented economic growth (3 references 2007/2006). A less noticed but equally important development is the steady increase of the birth rate in this province, a situation diametrically at odds with the persistent pattern of low fertility in Canada. Most surprising is the apparent lack of scholarly interest to this new development. My study seeks to address this void in the demographic literature . . ."

The elevator The elevator version

Exercise 2

Draft a one-paragraph version of your research problem

"A problem exists of social and research importance (territory). Some research already exists, but there is also clearly an absence of research in a particular area (gap). The researcher(s) is/are well prepared (means) to address the problem (goal) by conducting the following study (methodology)."

The field of writing studies needs this research project badly: the history of crises about writing (for example, "Why Johnny Can't Write," 1975; "Literacy Matters," 2007) often lead to knee-jerk, impromptu, and regressive policies such as returns to traditional school grammar instruction that have been shown to not improve student writing. The current cultural moment marks a turning point as sales of traditional print handbooks in the US and Canada drop precipitously. The "digital natives" who use these devices now turn to the web and to apps for knowledge, not to paper books. Online technologies have emerged over the last decade in response, such as learning management systems Moodle, Blackboard, and Desire2Learn. Websites developed over the last 30 years, such as Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL), offer static content to support students learning to write. Publishers such as Pearson (http://www.mycomplab.com/), Cengage, and McGraw-Hill all have developed their own online writing resource sites in an attempt to create online writing environments linked closely to their print products. What the publishers don't have and what we don't have right now in writing studies is a model for learning to write using online content that goes beyond the static web page and embraces social media and interaction among participants; that can be scaled the way massive open online course (MOOC) can; that function using gamification techniques familiar to the learners of the 2015 and beyond; and that welcome and encourage contributions from participants rather than focusing on the one-way downloads that traditional resources like Purdue's privilege one-way interactions.

Sample 1

The ability to write well is among the most universal of skill sets required in the modern workforce. At the same time, preparing students for writing across the many situations they will face in the 21st century economy is extremely challenging. It is a challenge worth investing in: Numerous studies over the past decade have demonstrated that raising national literacy rates has a profound effect on the productivity of the Canadian workforce, the quality of life of individual Canadians, and the growth of the Canadian economy. TD Bank found, for example, that a "1% increase in literacy boosts productivity 2.5% and output 1.5%" leading to a $32 billion increase in income for each 1% increase in national literacy rates. Writing ability is an important part of that picture, defined by the National Commission on Writing (2004) as a *threshold skill* which factors into hiring and promotion decisions at 52% of the companies they surveyed. The great challenge of preparing 21st century writers is not to provide them with the skills they need to successfully write specific types of texts. Instead, we need to help them develop the skills necessary to learn how to write across the range of modalities (social media, email), genres (reports, letters) and contexts (social, business) they will be faced with when they transition from high school classrooms to university and college courses, and into the workforce. A growing body of research, however, is showing us that this kind of learning is extremely difficult. This difficulty leads to poorer grades, higher dropout rates, and reductions in workplace productivity. If we can learn how to better smooth the learning road as writers move across contexts, we can improve college retention levels, build student academic success, and increase workplace productivity. Through this synthesis we hope to identify gaps in the current literature, develop avenues for future research, and explore implications the multidisciplinary literature on the development of writing ability offers for the design of 21st century writing curricula and assessments.

Sample 2

Argumentative Moves

"moves" are like tacit questions that grant writers answer

Moves are a way to organize the proposal

Moves create a narrative

What argumentative moves can you perform?

Sample: "Because Canada's Arctic Aboriginal peoples include diverse First Nations, Metis, and Inuit cultures in distinct settings, the Aklavik results cannot be presumed to generalize across the north."

Move: X
 X is not generalizable because these groups are diverse; therefore we need to study other groups

Sample: "the current risk prediction framework is inadequate for identifying high-risk subgroups and accurately estimating their risk levels. . .Consequently [this leads to] underestimation of the risk for these high-risk subgroups"

Move: Previous methods obscure X ; the proposed method promises to uncover X

Establishes that a problem exists

Provides motivation for the proposed study by implying the gap needs to be filled

"This consolidation appears to be pointing to a 'two-tiered' financial system: an increasingly 'exclusive' financial world accessible to those with capital and wealth, and high-cost financial practices for those populations who are prevented from accessing mainstream credit (ref. 2005)."

What is the problem?

Exercise 3

Write a statement that shows there is a problem that needs to be addressed.

Research territory refers to current research issues or problems

"Real world" territory refers to social problems or issues

Connect the two territories: a real world problem exists for which a research area can propose a solution

"Particularly worrisome has been the increase in adolescent gang membership. A subset of the offending population, estimated at 68% of institutionalized youth, are affiliated with a gang, yet little research has been done to distinguish gang members from other types of young offenders (Kratcoski &Kratcoski, 1996); Richter-White, 2003). It may be that young people are turning to gangs for protection from other gangs, as a way to gain respect, to escape from troubled homes, because their friends are doing it, peer pressure, or as a way to earn a living through drug trafficking, illegal weapons sales, robbery, and theft (Lloyd, 2002). However, the reasons why adolescents choose to join a gang remain understudied with no clear answers.

–Nicole Kostiuk, *Attachment in Incarcerated Adolescent Gang Members*, 2007.

Sample 3

"[this study] will also be of interest beyond the academic community. The project grows out of the initial steps taken by the office of the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba (TCRM). . . It is essential to know the history of agriculture in First Nations communities in order to understand what the barriers have been and how they may be removed."

Establishes that a problem exists

Provides motivation for the proposed study by implying the gap needs to be filled

"This consolidation appears to be pointing to a 'two-tiered' financial system: an increasingly 'exclusive' financial world accessible to those with capital and wealth, and high-cost financial practices for those populations who are prevented from accessing mainstream credit (ref. 2005)."

How does this connect to society?

Exercise 4

Write a sentence that connects your research to a real-world problem.

States the aim, general objective, chief contribution of the study

This move responds to the gap or problem identified in the proposal

"My study seeks to address this void in the demographic literature . . ."

"The principal goal of my study is to address these and other related questions and to uncover the underlying social demographic and socioeconomic factors responsible for the recent fertility rise in Alberta."

What is the goal?

Exercise 5

Revise the goal statement you created in Exercise 1 (the one sentence description of your proposal).

How the goal will be achieved, including descriptions of methods, procedures, plans, or actions and tasks

Writers demonstrate their methodological competency:

Presented the specific steps of their study

Named a theory or method that would enable them to reach the project goals

Step 2:

What is your method? (one sentence)

You'll need to elaborate this:

- Citations to others who have used it

- Identify how you might be modifying it/improving it

- Describe the steps/procedure in detail

What is the method?

Exercise 6

Write a one sentence answer to this question: What is your method?

"Vaccinia virus (VV) is considered the prototypic poxvirus, and is amenable to genetic manipulation through a multitude of available DNA recombination tools (450). VV has also been used extensively as a gene delivery mechanism, as its large DNA genome makes it relatively easy to insert foreign DNA sequences for protein expression in mammalian cells (50, 100). Despite the fact that the natural host for VV is unknown, VV remains an excellent model in which to study virus:host interactions due to its complex genome and vast array of anti-immune mechanisms (169). In response to the selective pressures initiated by the host immune system, poxviruses such as vaccinia virus encode a vast array or proteins which modulate both innate and adaptive immune responses (Table 1.2) (21, 105)."

John Taylor, *The inhibition of apoptosis and Bax activation by mitochondrial antiapoptotic proteins encoded by vaccinia virus and ectomelia virus*, Fall 2007. (bolding added)

Cite sources that support your methods

Addresses writer's credibility and readiness to conduct the research

Strategies:

1.Cite their own past or ongoing research to imply connection between proposed research and their competency

2.Make explicit claims about their competency based on previous research

Research plan/Methodology

1. Historical Context Analysis

2. Mapping Public Discourses of Fringe Finance

3. Narratives of Regulation

Citing others: writers build on others' work rather than demolishing it

Citing oneself: used to enhance writer's credibility

"Although sources of public data relating to corporate structure have been used to assess levels of corporate regionalization (Rugman, 2005, Rugman 2004) and processes of transnational class formation (Carroll 2004; Carroll and Fennema 2002), they have rarely been used in the critical finance literature."

Example

What is the plan?

Exercise 7

Outline your implementation plan in point form:

Schedule of activities

Sequence of work

Details of work plan

Each discipline has its own structures:

- Pharmacy: SOAP

- Business: Problem, solution, implementation

- Science: IMRAD

- Engineering: Introduction, formulation of the problem, results, conclusion

What is the dominant pattern in your discipline?