

Grant proposals: How to write and argue effectively

Sample 1

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.

Citations

Gap

Sample 2

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.

Real-world territory

Some General Moves

- Establish a research territory
- Establish that a problem exists
- Show how previous research leaves a gap in knowledge that my project fills
- Describe the goal of your work in relation to the gap
- Establish your methodological competency
- Describe your implementation plan

Some moves specific to a discipline

- X is not generalizable because these groups are diverse; therefore we need to study other groups
- Previous methods obscure X ; the proposed method promises to uncover X
- a real world problem exists for which a research area can propose a solution

Sample 3

“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 Kostiuik, *Attachment in Incarcerated Adolescent Gang Members*, 2007.

Final slide

Each discipline has it's 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?

Recommended Reading for graduate students:

Swales, J. M, & Feak, C. B. (2012). 3rd Ed. *Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.