

# How to Increase Your Professional Success through Persuasive Writing

by Michael J. Dowling

If you're a business owner, entrepreneur, or manager at any level, you need to know how to persuasively present your views in writing. Even if your job doesn't require you to write formal proposals, you almost certainly must write letters, e-mails, and memos to persuade others to accept your ideas, commit to your causes, fund your projects, try your products, or buy your services.

This article presents some of the key principles of persuasive writing. The elements are essentially the same for all types of communications, so I will use the generic term *proposal* to encompass them all. For more detailed guidance about proposal writing, I recommend reading *Persuasive Business Proposals; Writing to Win More Customers, Clients, and Contracts* by Tom Sant.

## The Elements of Persuasive Writing

In order to persuade others to take the actions you recommend, you must engage both their minds and their emotions. You need to present information that is understandable and accurate in a style that is thoughtful and engaging.

The exact format of your presentations will vary, but in general you will be well-advised to follow the seven steps outlined below. For shorter proposals, such as letters, memos, and e-mails, you may choose to abbreviate or skip some of these steps.

### **Step #1: Establish rapport.**

Briefly state your reason for writing. Did someone refer you? Are you responding to a request or invitation? Whatever your reason, get to the point without fawning.

### **Step #2: Clearly state the problem.**

People will be more receptive to your ideas when they know that you have understood their concerns. Demonstrate empathy by clearly stating their difficulty, need, issue, or point of view.

If you skip this step and launch right into your recommendation, readers of your proposal may feel skeptical and defensive. They will tend to think that you're more interested in your agenda than in theirs, and they may be right!

Summarize what they have told you about the costs associated with the issue or problem, and add any additional thoughts that come to your mind. Paint a realistic picture and create a sense of urgency. After reading this section of your proposal, you want people to say, "It's painful to see it in writing, but that hits the nail on the head. We need to do something now!"

### **Step#3: Summarize the desired outcomes**

List the goals your audience wants to achieve. Make it clear that *your* goal is to help them accomplish *their* goal.

### **Step #4: Highlight alternative solutions.**

Briefly describe any alternative solutions that are being considered or that come to your mind, and state the shortcomings of each. People will be better able to focus on your proposed solution if you first help them close their minds to the other options. And they will have more confidence in your recommendation if they know you've considered various courses of action.

### **Step #5: Recommend your solution.**

Now that you have stated the problem and ruled out alternative solutions, it's time to make your recommendation. State precisely how your idea, service, or product will solve their problem and help them attain their goals. Use positive language: "I am confident that within X months you will see ..."

### **Step #6: Back up your claims.**

Demonstrate that you can deliver what you have promised. Cite case studies, testimonials, and supporting data from other sources. Provide information about your company's staff, management philosophy, guarantees, and past successes.

### **Step #7: Ask for agreement.**

Clearly ask for the order, the meeting, or whatever you want. State how you will follow up. ("I will call you in a few days to schedule an appointment" or "Please sign the enclosed contract and return it to me.")

Close warmly, but professionally. Don't thank people for reading your proposal. Make it so good that they'll thank you!

Michael J Dowling is a writer, editor, and ghostwriter of books, articles, and Web copy that enable individuals and organizations to increase their visibility, credibility, and profitability. He has an MBA from Columbia Business School (NYC), where he was a Harriman Scholar, and is the author of three published books. Visit <http://michaeldowling.com> to learn more.