

***The Abstract Cannot be Abstract:
Crafting the Grant Proposal's
“Sales Pitch”***



**Robert Porter, Ph. D.
Grant-Winners Seminars
Knoxville TN
reporter@grant-winners.com**



Why a Sales Pitch?

- Short definition of a strong proposal:
“An elegant sales pitch”
- Proposal must “sell” an idea to skeptical reviewers
- Reviewers are seeking proposals that present a compelling case for funding
- Reviewers make up their minds very quickly whether they are “sold” on a proposal
- Problem: Academics are often uncomfortable using persuasive rhetoric





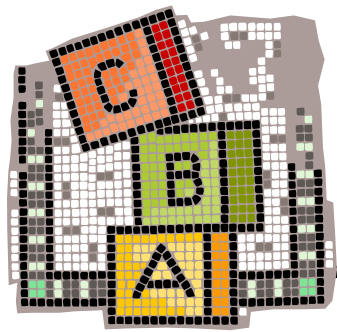
Warming up the audience...

OVERTURE = SALES PITCH
MUSICAL THEATRE GRANT PROPOSAL

Objectives:

- *Introduce major themes of the project*
- *Put reviewers in a more receptive mood*
- *Set expectation that they will like the rest of the proposal*





A 3-paragraph template...

I. Set the Stage – Lay Out the Problem (*“Who Cares?”*)

II. State the theme – Your Solution

III. Create a Vision (*“So What?”*)

- Paragraphs are not long: 3 - 4 sentences
- Total no more than 1/3 to 1/2 page
- Short, declarative sentences are best
- First person, active voice preferred



Start with the Pitch: Sell Your Idea!

I. Set the Stage – Lay Out the Problem (*“Who Cares?”*)

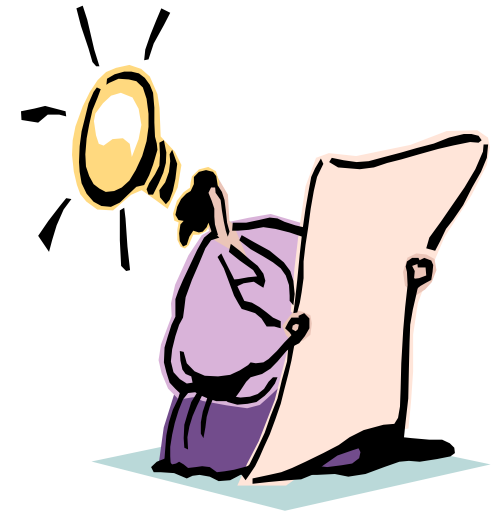
- A. Get the reviewer interested at the outset
- B. Identify the importance—stress the need
- C. Summarize the state of the art
- D. Describe technical challenges to solving the problem and potential benefits

II. State the theme – Your Solution

- E. Describe the concept and establish credibility
- F. Describe your project’s fundamental purpose

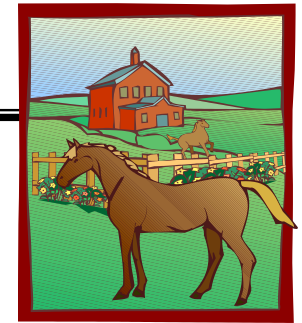
III. Create a Vision (*“So What?”*)

- G. Show how your work will advance the field
- H. Envision the world with the problem solved



The “pitch” should be the opening 2 - 3 paragraphs of the proposal’s very first section (after the abstract), regardless of what that section is called (INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND, PROBLEM STATEMENT, SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH, SPECIFIC AIMS, etc.)

Sample Pitch: USDA Proposal

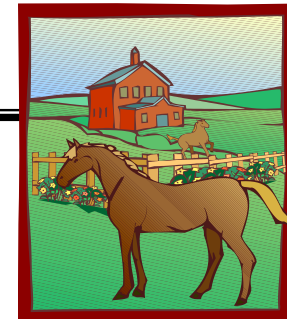


“Intravenous Magnesium as a Treatment Modality for Recurrent Airway Obstruction”

I. SETTING THE STAGE

(A) Recurrent Airway Obstruction (RAO) is a progressive, debilitating respiratory disease, occurring in 50% of mature horses, (B) with 5% affected severely enough to result in an end to their working careers or to euthanasia.^{1,2} It is a chronic, recurrent condition with clinical characteristics that are well recognized, although its pathogenesis is complex, multifactorial, and currently not well understood. As an indication of industry concern, in June of 2000, 30 of the world’s leading investigators were joined by pharmaceutical companies at a Michigan State University conference devoted entirely to improving RAO prevention and management.³ (C) Further, current management and therapeutic regimens for horses with chronic or severe disease are either not efficacious or are not able to be implemented. (D) For example, drugs commonly used to manage RAO, such as corticosteroids with anti-inflammatory properties and bronchodilators that open the passageways, also stress the heart, adding additional risk to an already debilitated animal.^{4,5} Strategies to remove environmental precipitators such as dust and mold often fail as many horse owners are unable or unwilling to comply with such husbandry recommendations.⁵

Sample Pitch: USDA Grant

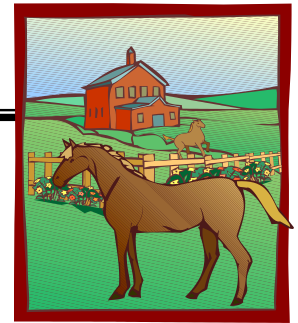


“Intravenous Magnesium as a Treatment Modality for Recurrent Airway Obstruction”

II. PROJECT THEMES

(E) With this study, we propose to administer intravenous magnesium to horses with acute and chronic RAO to determine if this treatment improves respiratory function and/or reduces arterial hypertension, without the deleterious side effects of other commonly administered drugs. Recent case reports show magnesium to be efficacious for acute human asthmatics who fail to respond to more conventional therapy.^{7,8} (F) As RAO is increasingly seen as an equine analog to asthma in humans (replacing the previous use of the COPD model),^{9,10} and severely affected RAO horses demonstrate many of the same clinical signs as human asthmatics, RAO horses could be equally responsive to this treatment.

Sample Pitch: USDA Grant, cont'd



“Intravenous Magnesium as a Treatment Modality for Recurrent Airway Obstruction”

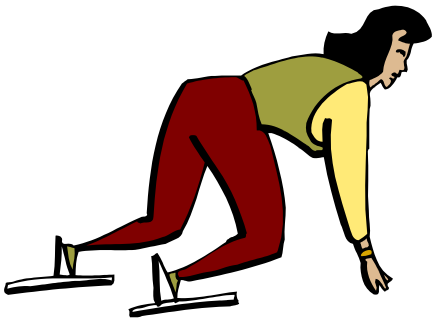
III. VISION

(G) Should the research hypothesis be supported, clinicians will have another viable treatment modality at their disposal, one that is inexpensive, and effective in treating a resistant disease without the damaging side effects of other modalities. (H) Additionally, horse owners and breeders could reduce the significant financial losses caused by the malady, currently estimated at more than \$1.2 billion annually in the US alone.¹¹

No guarantee of success...



...but definitely a stronger start!



RMR article:

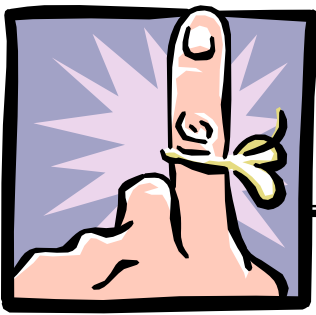
*Research Management Review, Volume 18, Issue 2
Fall/Winter 2011*

Crafting a Sales Pitch for Your Grant Proposal

Robert Porter
University of Tennessee

ABSTRACT

Experienced grant writers know that reviewers are quick to decide whether they like or do not like the proposals they are reading. Therefore, much of the success of any given proposal rides on the strength of the first page—its capacity to “sell” the research idea to skeptical reviewers. This paper describes a writing technique designed to elicit a positive response from grant reviewers at the outset. While the three-paragraph template does not guarantee a winning outcome, it will set the stage for high reviewer scores now required for success in the increasingly competitive world of sponsored research.



Remember...

Much of the mood you create for reviewers at the beginning of your proposal will carry over to the finish!

