



OST GLOBAL SOLUTIONS



# Writing Persuasive Government Proposals

Days 1, 2, 3

OST Bid & Proposal Academy  
Course

[www.ostglobalsolutions.com](http://www.ostglobalsolutions.com)

# Agenda

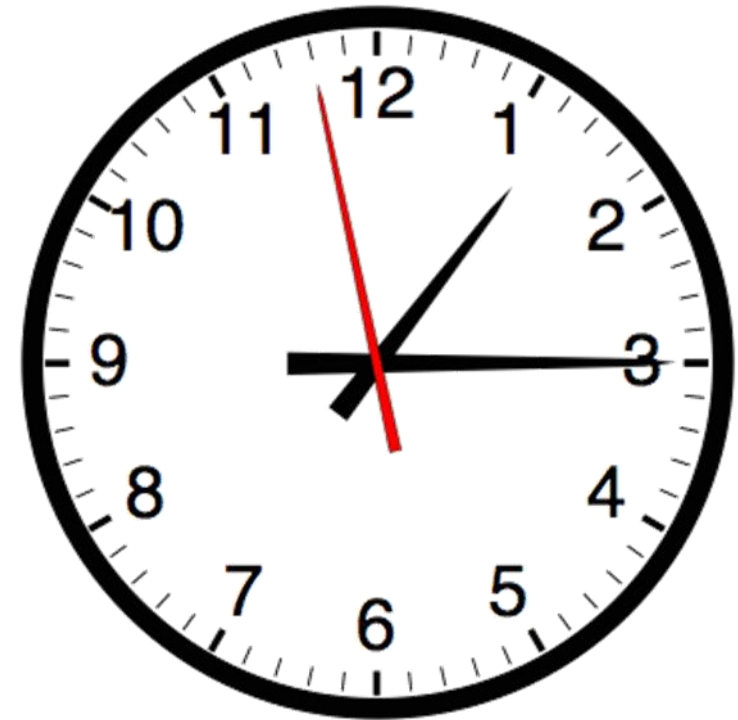


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- 01:00 PM – 02:45 PM Training
- 02:45 PM – 03:00 PM Break
- 03:00 PM – 04:00 PM Training

Please, give yourself the benefit of focus and limit email and use of cell phones to breaks



# How to Maximize the Learning Process



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- How adults learn:
  - Understand WHY things work a certain way
  - Participate in exercises
  - Ask questions
  - Relate the material to your own experience
  - Take notes
- Bring up topics of interest to your job
- Move around during exercises



# Introductions – Who is Who



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- Your Name, Position, Company
- An interesting fact about your life
- Your experience writing proposals
- What are you looking to get out of this training?





# Module 1

Class Roadmap and Three Elements of the  
Proposal Speed Writing System

# Can You Relate to Any of These?



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*You have taken a step to gain advantage over majority of your competitors who are using outdated techniques and tools for writing*

- Have you pulled one too many all-nighters rewriting otherwise atrocious proposal sections?
- Do you want to manage or write proposals more efficiently so that they don't occupy so much of your time?
- Do you struggle, or see others in your organization struggle, with writer's block where it comes to proposals?
- Do you dislike writing wholesale?
- Do you want to gain professional skills (or know how to teach others those skills) in ensuring your sections are both compliant and highly compelling so that your proposals win?



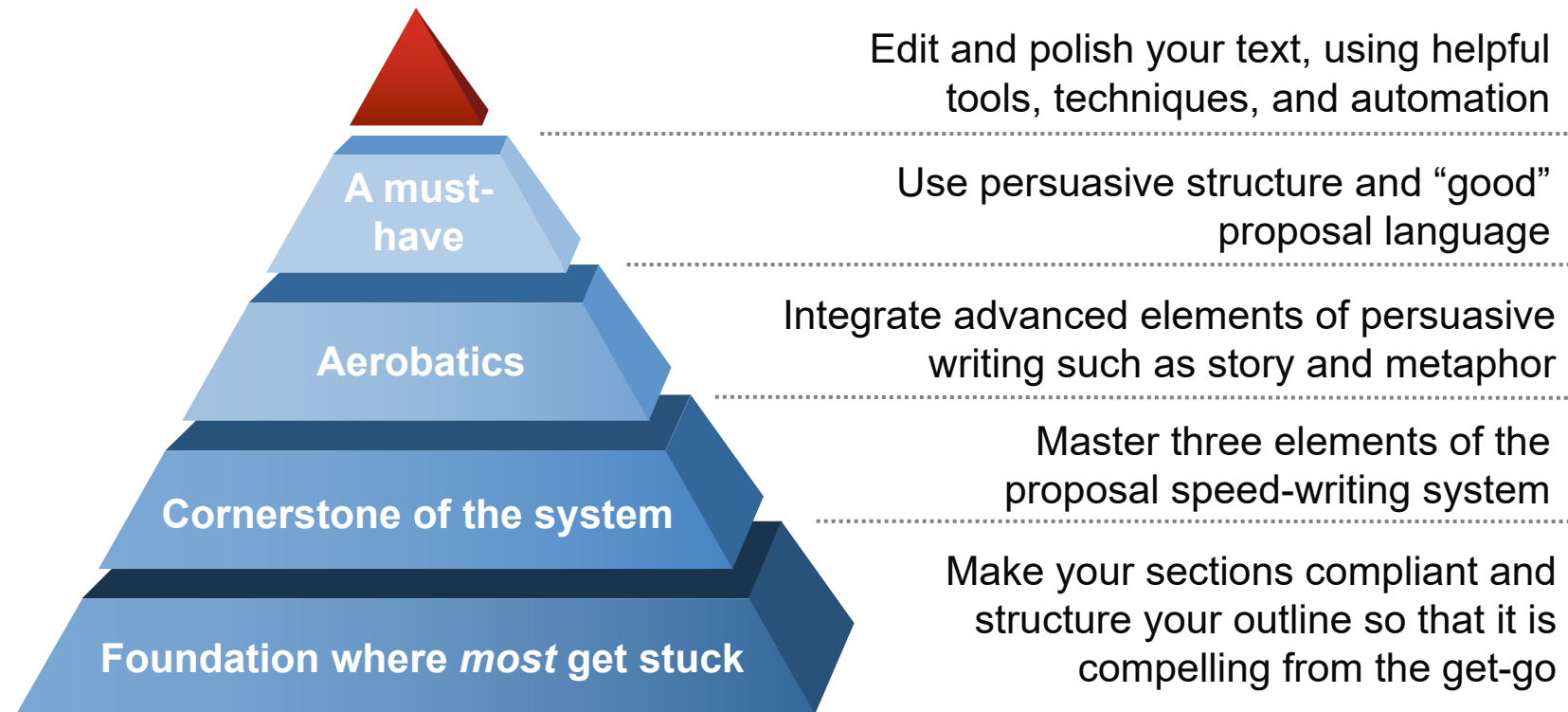
# Class Roadmap



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*This class covers basic and advanced elements of proposal writing, and offers you hands-on workshop elements to practice them in real time*



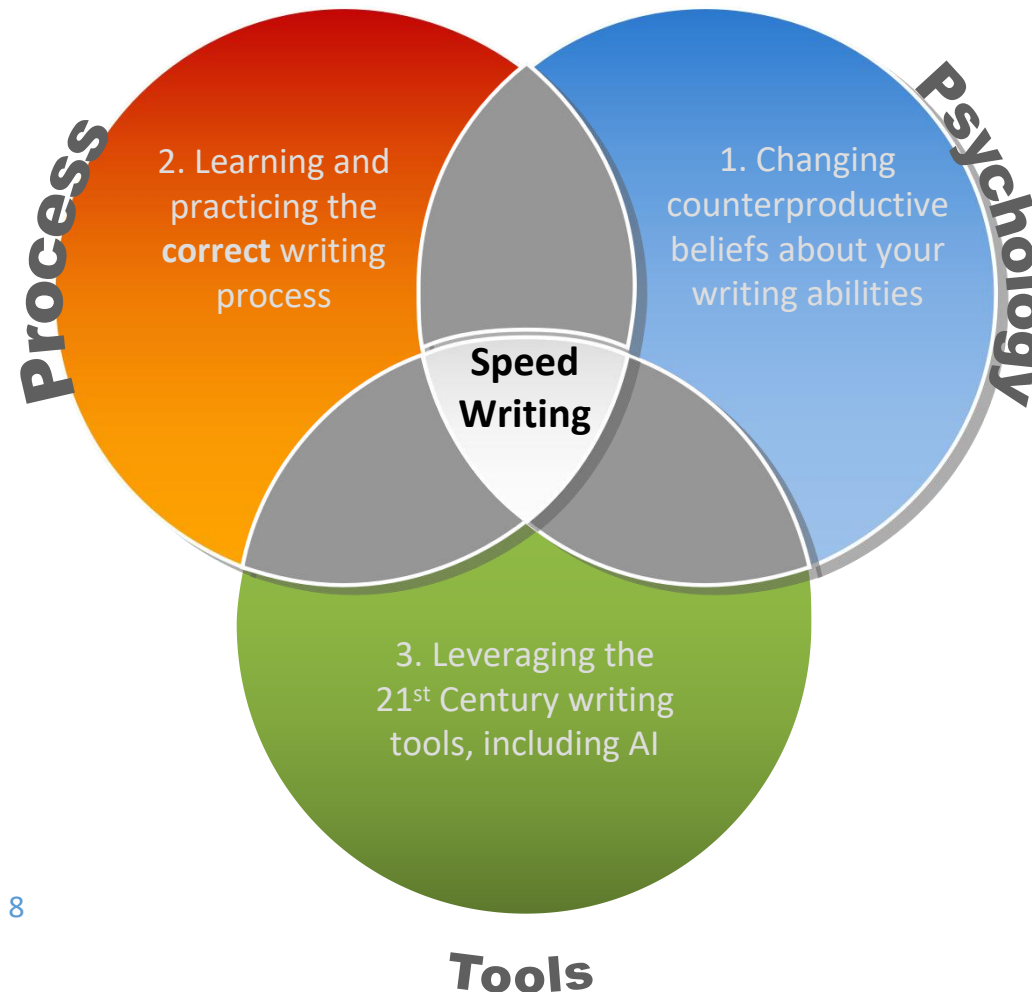
# Three Elements of the Proposal Speed Writing System



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*All three must be present to ensure the most efficient and enjoyable proposal writing process*







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Please, Complete an Assignment  
for **Module 1** Prior to Proceeding  
to the Next Module

# Module 1 Quiz: Speed Writing System



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1. What is the first foundational step where most proposal writers get stuck, according to the Class Roadmap?
  - a) Editing for polish
  - b) Using metaphors
  - c) Structuring outlines to be compliant and compelling
  - d) Learning how to automate compliance checks
2. Three elements of the proposal writing system are:
  - a) 1. Process, 2. People, 3. Psychology
  - b) 1. Process, 2. Psychology, 3. Tools
  - c) 1. Tools, 2. Process, 3. Counterproductive Beliefs
3. **True or False?** The use of AI and other 21<sup>st</sup>-century tools is discouraged in the writing process because it's cheating and produces low-quality content.





# Module 2

A Close Look at Compliance and Outlining  
Inside a Proposal Section

# The Foundation for Proposal Sections: Compliant and Compelling



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*Before we dive into the Three Elements, let's look at compliance closely*

- Compliance gets you in the door
  - Non-compliant sections get your proposal in the trash can or simply lower your score
  - Compliant sections make your proposal barely passable
- Compliance will not win you a proposal
- Compelling is what counts AFTER you are compliant
- Being persuasive within the bounds of being compliant is the tough part in writing government proposals





# Getting Your Section Compliant



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*Note that this course is not about outlining the whole proposal, it is about outlining within sections – but it will make your outlines better for the entire proposal*

- Analyze the RFP requirements
- Remember that RFP doesn't have requirements in one neat package – they come from different places
- Determine which sections “intersect” where it comes to the requirements and double-check the proposal manager's decisions
- Don't get hung up on the Statement of Work section headings – they are often misleading – carefully read what's being requested
- Pull together the requirements in the section
- Determine the overall focus (top-down)
- Then look at the key words (bottom-up)



# Here is an Example of How to Find Key Words



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*Note that there are several different possible keyword combinations and ways to outline the section*

**Section L: Describe a qualified on-site support team availability to support testing during regular operations and surges.**

**Summarize your approach for supporting all test needs using personnel, tools, and systems, as described in the SOO.**

- **Go Slow**
- **Men at Work**
- **Go**
- **Slow Men at Work**



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# Module 2 Exercise 1: Compliance Phrases



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*See Word File: Writing Assignment for Exercises*

In this scenario, you are responding to a FEMA RFP requiring an onsite support team for an IT testbed. You will analyze requirements from Sections L (proposal instructions), M (evaluation criteria), C (Statement of Objectives), and H (Special Contract Requirements) to create a two-page section outline that demonstrates both compliance and logical structure.

- Read the requirements and determine the main focus of the section (what it is about). Select the most appropriate option.
  - a) Specifying the required technical qualifications, certifications, and educational credentials for key support personnel.
  - b) Demonstrating your approach and qualifications to field a fully-staffed, on-site support team that meets FEMA's staffing thresholds, performance metrics, technical objectives, and contract credentials.
  - c) Outlining a risk management plan for network security testing, including backup and recovery procedures.
  - d) Providing a detailed approach to satisfying the Statement of Objectives.



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CASE STUDY FOR EXERCISES  
Bid & Proposal Academy's Writing Persuasive  
Federal Proposals

**Exercise Instructions:** Analyze requirements, outline, and develop a section up to 2 pages in length. Font requirements: 12-point Times New Roman font, 10 Arial Narrow font for graphics, single-spaced, 1-inch margins.

#### RFP Requirements

**Section L:** Describe a qualified on-site support team availability to support testing during regular operations and surges. Summarize your approach to supporting all test needs using personnel, tools, and systems, as described in the SOO.

**Section M:** The degree to which qualified personnel is available at the minimum 95% of the required staffing level, to meet day-to-day operations and surge demands. Ability to run tests efficiently using the existing test bed facility.

#### SOO: 2.3.5 Task 5 – Qualified, On-Site Support Team

To support its network security software testing effort, FEMA requires the following:

- Sufficient number of highly skilled, experienced network engineers, system administrators, and domain administrators not only for routine operations, but to support surges in activity.
- Ability to respond promptly to all test needs throughout the test process.
- A trouble ticket system to track assistance requests.

#### Section H:

**Network engineer:** Oversees the installation, configuration, testing, and maintenance of networked information systems. Minimum 5 years of experience. Desired certifications: MCSE, CCNA, or CCNP. Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science, Information Technology or similar field.

**System Administrator:** Responsible for the design, installation, configuration, administration, tuning, and optimization servers, networks, and related software and components. Minimum 3 years of experience. Desired Certifications: MCSA. Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science, Information Technology or similar field.

**Domain Administrator:** Missing description.



# Module 2 Exercise 2: Identify Key Phrases



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- Read and highlight all the key phrases in text on your sheet of paper. Next, select only the key phrases that are compliance-critical and disregard any words or phrases that are filler, irrelevant, or not explicitly required by the RFP. Think like an evaluator—what would they be scanning for?

Instructions (L)	Evaluation Criteria (M)	Statement of Objectives (SOO) (C)	Special Contract Requirements (H)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Qualified on- site support team availability</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> As described in the SOO</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Comprehensive surge staffing model</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Detailed schedule management</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Summarize your</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support testing during regular operations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support testing during surges</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Approach to supporting all test needs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Using personnel, tools, and systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Qualified personnel available at minimum 95 % of required staffing level</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Continuous improvement processes</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Meet day- to- day operations demands</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Resource optimization guidelines</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Meet surge demands</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Run tests efficiently using the existing test bed facility</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Efficiency- gain projections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient number of highly skilled, experienced network engineers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient number of system administrators</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient number of domain administrators</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Automated backup protocols</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> For routine operations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> To support surges in activity</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Help desk call volume forecast</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ability to respond promptly to all test needs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> To support its network security software testing effort</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Highly skilled, experienced</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Onboarding workflow diagram</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Trouble ticket system to track assistance requests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Professional development stipend</li> </ul> <p><b>Network Engineer:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Installation, configuration, testing, and maintenance of networked information systems</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Minimum 5 years of experience</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Desired certifications: MCSE, CCNA, or CCNP</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Alternative certification paths</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's degree in computer science, information technology, or similar field</li> </ul> <p><b>System Administrator:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Design, installation, configuration, administration, tuning, and optimization of servers, networks, and related software/components</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Minimum 3 years of experience</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Desired certification: MCSA</li> </ul> <p><b>Domain Administrator:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Preferred resume templates</li> </ul>

# Module 2 Exercise 2 Answer Key



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- Your answers should look like this:

Instructions (L)	Evaluation Criteria (M)	Statement of Objectives (SOO) (C)	Special Contract Requirements (H)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Qualified on- site support team availability</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> As described in the SOO</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Comprehensive surge staffing model</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Detailed schedule management</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Summarize your</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support testing during regular operations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support testing during surges</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Approach to supporting all test needs</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Using</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Personnel</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Tools</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Qualified personnel available at minimum 95 % of required staffing level</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continuous improvement processes</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Meet day- to- day operations demands</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Resource optimization guidelines</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Meet surge demands</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Run tests efficiently using the existing test bed facility</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Efficiency- gain projections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient number of highly skilled, experienced network engineers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient number of system administrators</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient number of domain administrators</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Automated backup protocols</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> For routine operations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> To support surges in activity</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Help desk call volume forecast</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ability to respond promptly to all test needs</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> To support its network security software testing effort</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Highly skilled, experienced</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Onboarding workflow diagram</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Trouble ticket system to track assistance requests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Professional development stipend</li> </ul> <p><b>Network Engineer:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Installation, configuration, testing, and maintenance of networked information systems</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Minimum 5 years of experience</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Desired certifications: MCSE, CCNA, or CCNP</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alternative certification paths</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's degree in computer science, information technology, or similar field</li> </ul> <p><b>System Administrator:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Design, installation, configuration, administration, tuning, and optimization of servers, networks, and related software/components</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Minimum 3 years of experience</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Desired certification: MCSA</li> </ul> <p><b>Domain Administrator:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Preferred resume templates</li> </ul>

# Module 3 Exercise 3: Outline Your Section



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- Notice different possible logical groupings of key words – how do L, M, C, and H intersect?
- Decide how to structure your section outline and develop your outline
- Note that you don't need to put any numbers in the outline since it is just one section – just use bullets and sub-bullets

**Submit your outline to  
[service@ostglobalsolutions.com](mailto:service@ostglobalsolutions.com)**



# Module 3

Annotating a Compliant Proposal Outline  
Inside a Section



# Annotating Your Section



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Proposal Managers sometimes stop at a top-level outline and leave figuring out the details to subject matter experts

Some of this information can be added right away, and other after brainstorming

Be prepared to rearrange and tweak as your thinking matures

*Just like anything in proposals, outlining is an iterative process, even with AI-based tools*

## Proposal Manager Creates the Requirements-Based Outline

Start with L (Instructions)

Add in M (Evaluation Criteria)

Add C or J (Statement of Work)

Add H, CDRLs, etc.

## Proposal Manager May Take the First Cut But Authors Finish the Annotated Outline

Add your interpretation of requirements

Add templates for tables

Add must-have figure placeholders

Add applicable win themes

Add other points of discussion if known

Add cross-references between sections and volumes

Add introductions and transitions

Rearrange bullets within sections and streamline while minding compliance

Submit for in-process reviews, improve, and freeze the compliance part after Pink Team

# Points to Keep in Mind



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*Rules of outlining within the section are less strict than those for outlining the whole proposal*

- At the top level, try to present the major points in order as they appear in the requirements
- **Within** the section, often you don't have to follow the exact order of the requirements
- You can tell a better story, even if it entails changing the order of the key words
- The most important thing is to ensure that nothing gets overlooked, and you don't end up with "orphan" requirements
- The best practice is to **bold** the compliance key phrases for ease of navigation



# Infuse the Section Flow



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*Design the proper paragraph flow for greater persuasion, to make your sections **compelling** by design; use 8Ws to guide the paragraph flow*

## Higher level summary sections - X or X.X outline levels

**Why:** Customer problem, challenge, or key risk factor behind the requirement

**What:** What do we propose to do in response to the requirement?

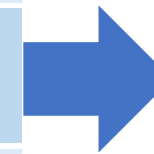
**Who:** Who exactly is going to do this part of work, by name and title?

**How:** Step-by-step approach with benefits to the customer and risk mitigation

**When:** In what sequence we are going to do it per schedule, or when have we done it before?

**Where:** Indicate the location or facility, or say where we have done it before successfully

**Wow:** Powerful section conclusion



## Lower-level sections for X.X.X levels and beyond

Only if you have room:  
**Why**

**What, Who, and How**

Only if you have room:  
**When, Where and Wow**

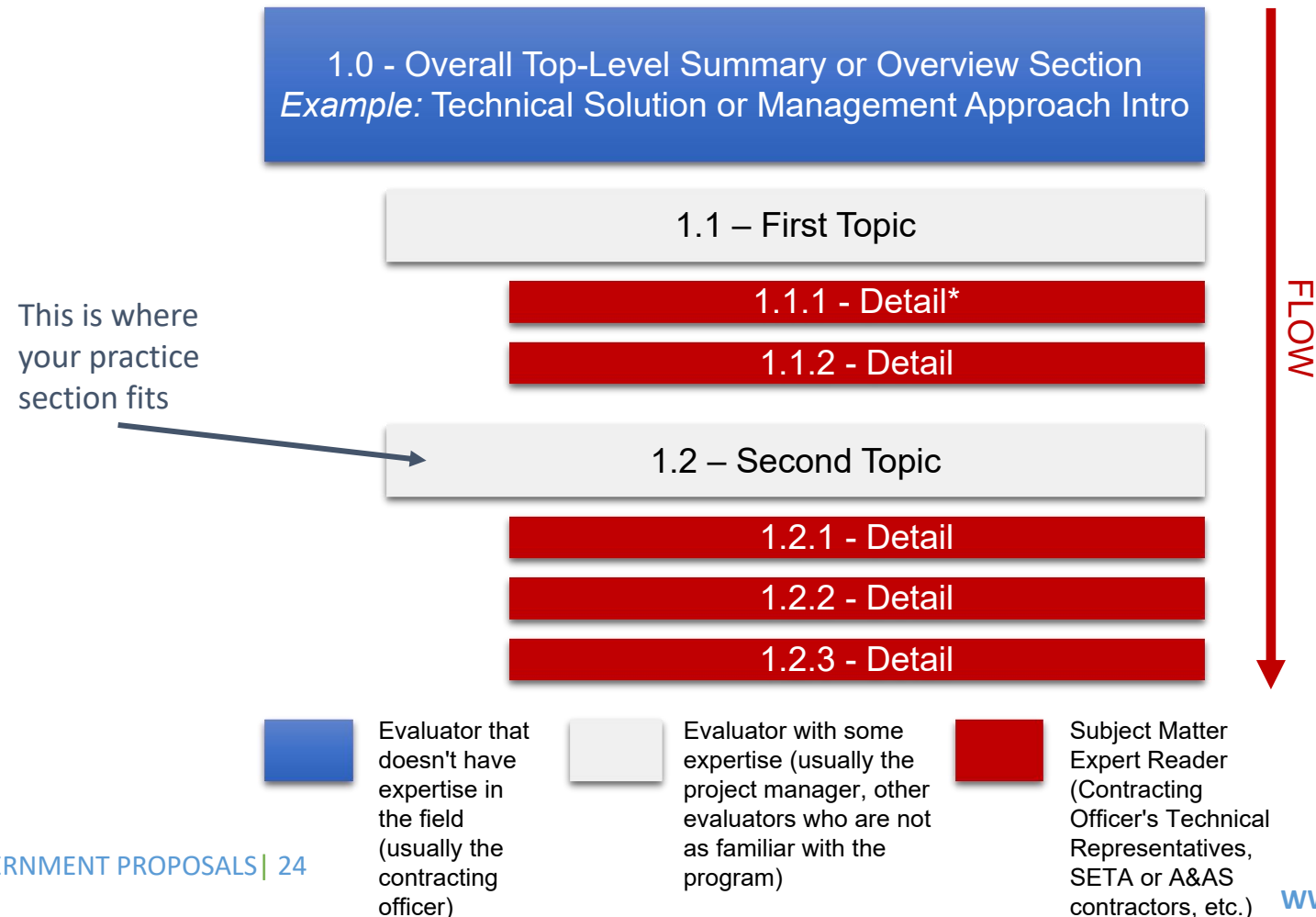
# Proposal Level Section Flow



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*If the RFP permits, go from general to specific, and from an overview to greater detail*



# Determine Where Your Section Fits in the Overall Proposal Flow

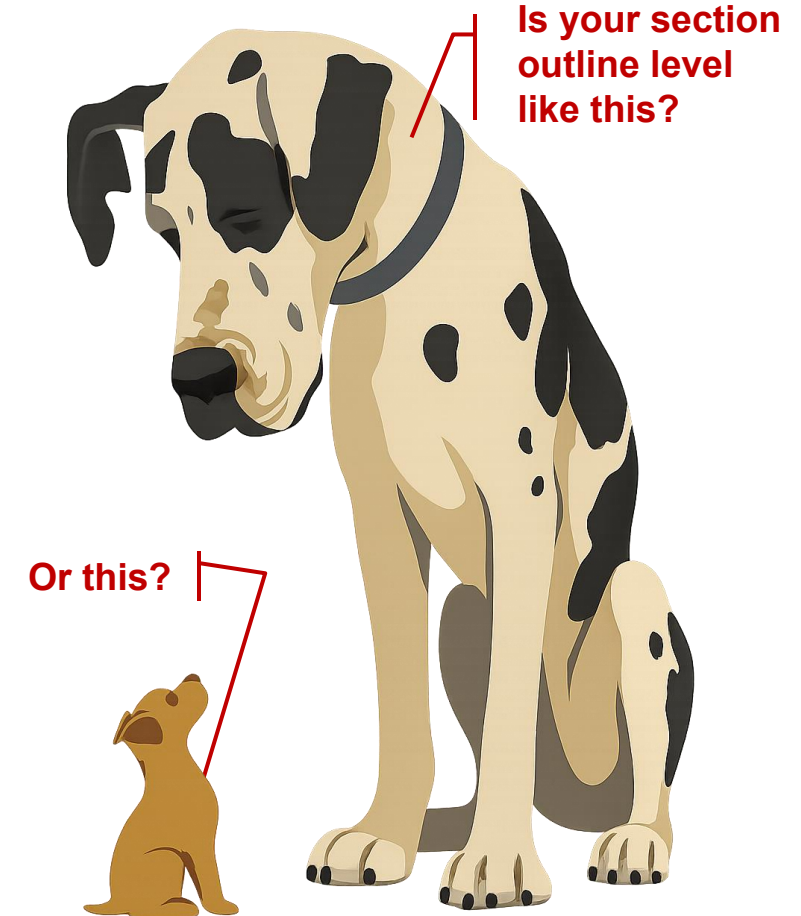


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*This helps you determine the focus of your section, and the level of detail*

- The level of detail depends on where your section is in the proposal outline
  - Examine the outline and determine your section's hierarchy and therefore the level of the story detail you are going to include
- Know your page count allocation
- Sometimes you cannot afford to address every single key word
- You need to figure out how to group the requirements in reasonable “chunks” that you can address together
- Determine what other sections (and authors) you must coordinate with







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to the Next Module

# Module 3 Quiz



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1. **Which “W” belongs at the very top level of each section’s paragraph flow?**
  - A. **When:** In what sequence we’ll do the work.
  - B. **Where:** Which locations or facilities we’ll use.
  - C. **Why:** The customer’s problem or risk factor behind the requirement.
  - D. **Wow:** A powerful conclusion.
2. **In the Proposal Level Section Flow, a detailed subsection level is usually meant to be thoroughly understood by the following government evaluator:**
  - A. The Contracting Officer with no technical background.
  - B. Other non-technical evaluators unfamiliar with the program.
  - C. Subject-matter experts (e.g., COR, SETA, A&AS contractors).
  - D. The Source Selection Authority.
3. **Which statement best describes how you should handle the *order* of key phrases within a section?**
  - A. You must follow the exact order as written in the RFP—no exceptions.
  - B. You can rearrange phrases to tell a more logical story, as long as nothing gets dropped and key phrases are easy to find.
  - C. Always group all technical requirements first, then management requirements.
  - D. You’re free to omit any phrase you think is unimportant.
4. **True or False?**

Outlining is an iterative process—you may rearrange, add transitions, and tweak after your first draft.



# Module 3 Exercise 2: Outlining and Annotating

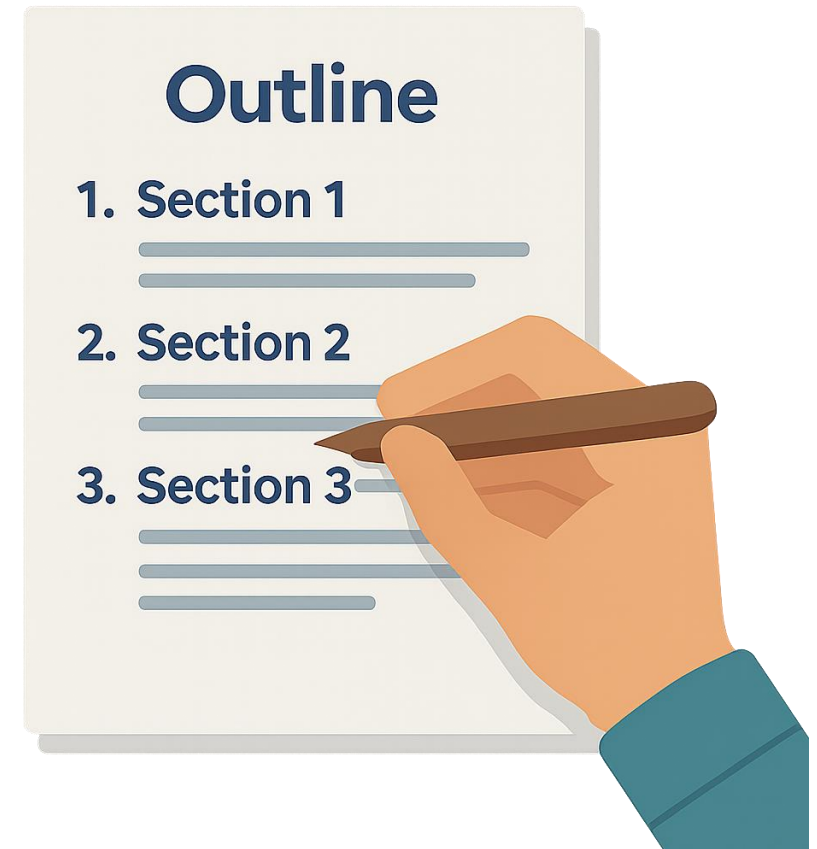


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*Laws of speed writing don't apply at the whole proposal level; they don't even apply at the annotated outline level; they become useful at the heart of each section*

- Annotate your section
  - Add content notes
  - Add tables and raw graphic concepts
- Notice where you reach the limits of where you can take your section without further brainstorming, decisions, or AI advice
- After this step, once your outlining stops, the laws of speed-writing begin to apply
- Send your annotated outline to [service@ostglobalsolutions.com](mailto:service@ostglobalsolutions.com)





# Module 4

## Element 1: Psychology

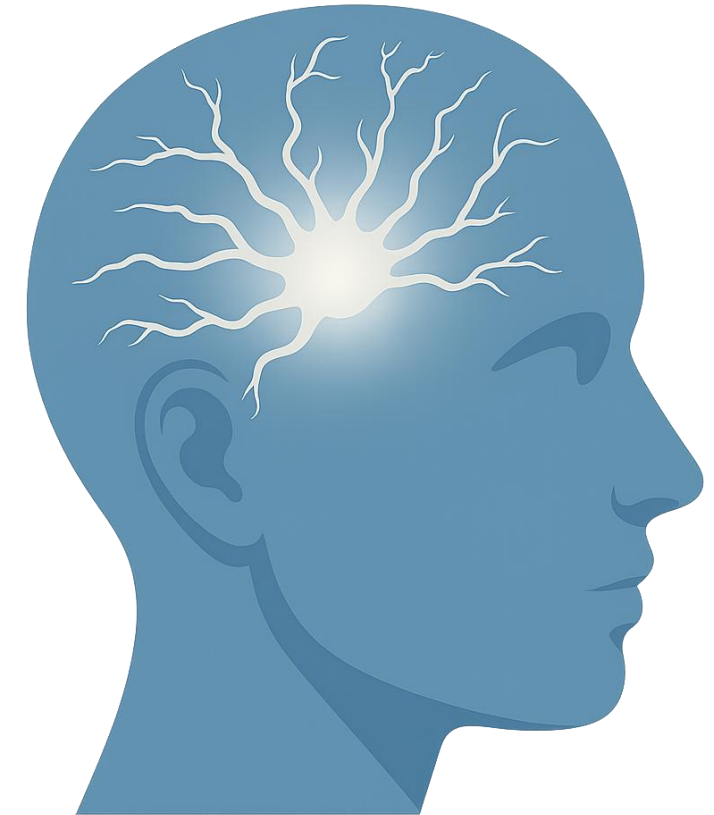
# Element 1 of the Proposal Speed Writing System



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- Mental blocks lower our ability to do anything: if we believe we can't, we can't
- Psychology matters: most elite athletes, successful actors, or high-performing business executives have coaches that focus on psychology of performance
- Mental state is key to achieving the height of human abilities
- Changing the psychology and unhelpful beliefs about writing transforms you and your proposal team



# Questions to Uncover Self-Limiting Beliefs About Writing



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*Even if you are a willing and able writer, knowing how to deal with people's self-limiting beliefs will transform the nature of your proposal work*

- Do you believe you are **not good at writing**?
  - Has someone else told you this or is there a “voice” in your head judging you?
  - What specifically makes you feel that you are not good?
- Do you feel like a **writing or even an intellectual fraud**?
- Do you just simply **dislike** writing but will write well if needed?
- OR... Do you believe you are a **good writer and can even enjoy it** but inevitably procrastinate and dread writing anyway?





# Overcoming the Initial Blocks



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*It is amazing how quickly we got stereotyped as kids and how we perpetuate these stereotypes years later*

- Most myths about writing come from early education experiences
- Believe there are the anointed ones for whom writing is a birthright (unlike us):
  - “Special people” with the soul of a poet who are clever at their use of words (may wear a French beret)
  - Have large vocabularies with the right adjectives to define anything
  - Are “artistic” and “creative”
- Few were taught the correct process for transforming **thought** into written word
- Many were punished with a perpetual “C” in English
- Most adult writing classes are **about editing** and hence don’t work



# Dispelling the Myths About Writing



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*Remember: if you can think and talk, you can write (ability to talk is optional)*

- Proposal writing **does not** require exceptional talent
- Passion is conveyed through:
  - Clear plans, customer knowledge, facts, and proof
  - ...Not the clever wording and large vocabularies
- Negative self-talk is more common than you would imagine
  - Most everyone with critical thinking abilities questions and criticizes themselves ... a lot
  - Don't need to get to the root of it: just recognize the voice and decide to silence it whenever it comes up
  - Temporary silencing is perfectly OK



# Getting Down to Specifics is the Only Way to Help



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*Let's explore: What do you and/or your writers SPECIFICALLY dislike about writing?*

- ☐ The typing itself or the challenge of putting thoughts into words?
- ☐ The effort of organizing the ideas into a logical order?
- ☐ The writing not well-connected to what you are trying to say?
- ☐ Appearing to be "padding" to fill the pages after getting the basic idea across?
- ☐ Failing to find the right words?
- ☐ Seeing too many connections so it's hard to structure the thoughts or focus?
- ☐ Fear of seeming incompetent or not as smart when your section doesn't come out quite as intended?
- ☐ The dread of how long the writing takes, and how much time this proposal is going to steal out of your life?

# Dealing with the Dislike of Typing or Translating Thoughts Into Words...

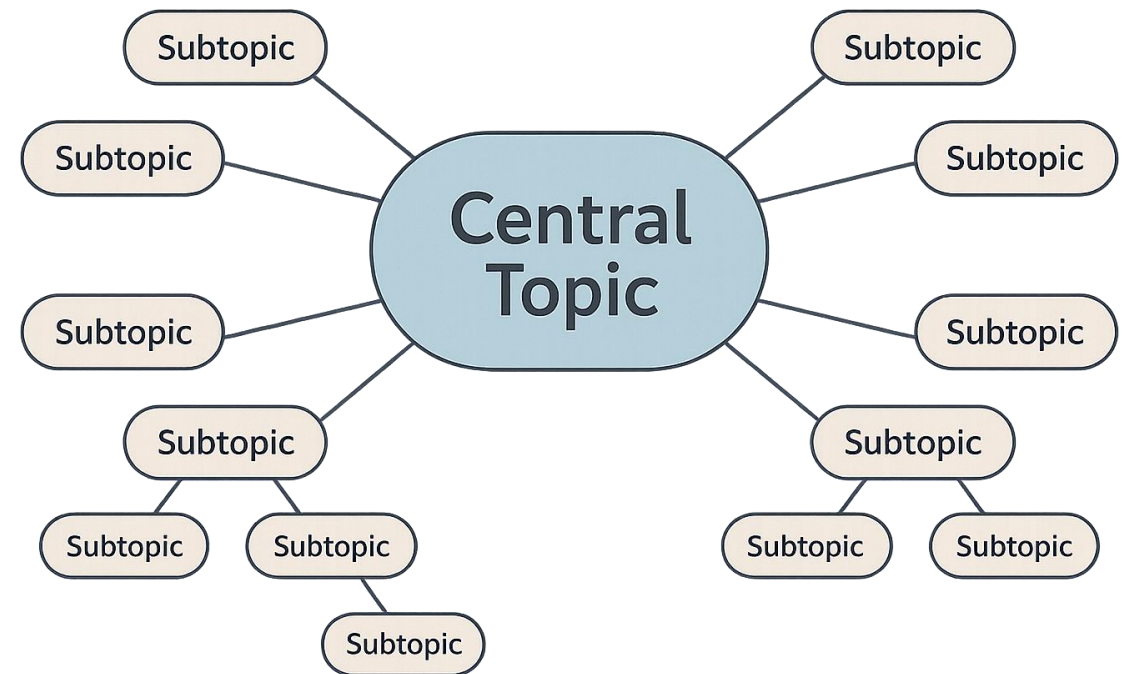


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*There are tools to help you or your writers through both difficult blocks*

- When it is a dislike of typing:
  - Assign another writer to interview
  - Use voice to text transcription software (Teams, Zoom, Otter.ai, Fireflies.ai, voice to text in gen AI apps, etc.)
- Create bullet points or stream of consciousness thoughts and have AI write the first draft
- When it's a hard time translating thoughts into words:
  - Get away from outlining
  - Master mind mapping techniques
    - Don't require precise "words" – concepts, associations, or pictures are OK as a first pass
  - Accept it may be a multi-step process



# When It is Hard to Organize the Ideas into a Logical Order



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*The biggest problem for people who have this issue is the temptation to cut and paste; they usually **drown** in a sea of text*

- Avoid cutting and pasting wholesale
  - Use a hard copy print out of boilerplate sections to stimulate ideas
  - The less text to wade through, the better
- Use the 8Ws sequence to:
  - Sort out who does what to whom and why
  - Answer questions about every aspect of the problem
  - Use pre-built section flow to develop your first draft
  - Create an AI prompt around 8Ws to sort through the material and move it in the right order
- Prioritize your mind maps or use UNO or Rico Clusters to figure out the hierarchy of ideas when brainstorming





# If the Writing is Not Well-Connected to What You are Trying to Say



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*Some of the blocks are tough but it doesn't mean they don't have a solution*

- Get your thoughts together first, **before** starting to write; don't skip the brainstorming
  - What is the approach?
  - What are you going to say?
- Picture an **evaluator** clearly in your head while writing – what are you trying to convey?
- Be ready to **edit radically** if you are verbose
- Experiment with **images and flowcharts**:
  - Write an entire thought or idea in pictures
  - Make the pictures as simple as possible
  - Draw the pictures almost as if you were writing a sentence
  - Run your pictorial by others and have them talk through it
  - Feed your pictorial to AI and ask the AI to talk through it
  - Get rid of anything extra from the pictures that doesn't help

## BRAINSTORMING



## VISUALIZATION



## DRAFTING





# What if You Feel Like You are “Padding” to Fill the Pages After Getting the Basic Idea Across?



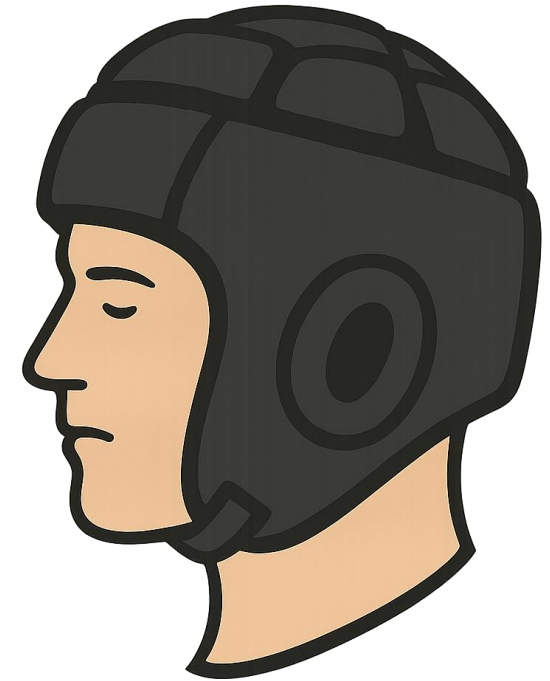
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*Padding is good in contact sports but not so good in writing*

- Put more emphasis on developing content and brainstorming: have more things to say rather than saying the same thing repeatedly
- Know that it is possible to tell a meaningful and elaborate story even about the simplest of things if you think through it well
  - Answer all the 8Ws
  - Explore the WHY and the HOW in detail
  - Tell anecdotes of past performance and customer “kudos”
- Use AI to develop additional content and point out what aspects of the solution you are missing

## PADDING YOUR WRITING



# Failing to Find the Right Words



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*Remember – knowing what to say is half the battle – if you stick to nouns, verbs, and assorted facts, there will be no room to worry whether the words are “right”*

- Remember – power writing is about nouns and verbs
- Adjectives and adverbs are there for specific descriptions
  - **Red** car vs. state-of-the-art car
- Issue a list of action verbs appropriate for proposals
- Use pictorials and flowcharts – start with section graphics first
- Don't focus on the craft of writing – just convey the content
- Finding the right words for proposals is overrated



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## EIGHTY PROPOSAL POWER VERBS – HANDOUT

The usual proposal language, called “~~proposalese~~,” is weak and boring. See for yourself:

*“Our outstanding team of engineers with reputation for world-class service can provide innovative and flexible solutions to ensure that the government receives unparalleled comprehensive maintenance support at all times and can utilize the facility on a 24x7 basis.”*

We can point out multiple problems with this sentence, but we will pick the biggest offender of all—the excessive use of adjectives. For those of you who don't remember grammar well, adjectives are words that answer such questions as *What kind? How much? How many? Which one? and Whose?*

Adjective-holics believe that real writers have a special talent to draw on their rich vocabularies to pick the perfect words to describe something well. They tend to say, “I can't understand it, but it sounds so good!” So, they pack those adjectives into a proposal like sardines. In the sentence above, the writer managed to stuff more than a half-dozen adjectives! We are sure he or she believed it sounded good...

The truth is, certain superlatives that appear in many proposals and marketing materials, such as “world-class” or “outstanding”, instantly send a negative message to the evaluator. So do multiple adjectives in the same sentence or paragraph. The unintended message is something like “I revel in unsubstantiated puffery to impress you—I am full of hot air.”

Adjectives are useful only when the noun or verb alone cannot convey the specific meaning that the adjective adds. When you describe an “uninterrupted flow,” for example, the word “flow” alone is not enough to convey the meaning. Better yet, whenever you can, quantify your nouns rather than qualifying them—instead of describing *What kind?* and *Which?*, state *How much?* and *How many?* Otherwise, ruthlessly cut the adjectives and your proposals are sure to benefit.

The most powerful proposal text comes from sticking to nouns and verbs. Finding good nouns may be easier—you usually know what you deliver. It is the verbs where everyone struggles. We have seen proposals with only four verbs other than the various forms of the verb “to be”: **provide, ensure, utilize** (the word we despise), and **bring**.

1 | Page

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# Fear of Seeming Incompetent When Your Section Doesn't Come Out Quite as Intended



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*This is a consequence of psychology impeding our ability to write*

- A direct result of the “voices” and the impostor syndrome
- Rejoice in knowing that first drafts are almost NEVER perfect
- You only technically WRITE the first draft (the rest is editing)
- Talk out the section with someone BEFORE you begin to write, to gain confidence in what you have to say – or run it by AI
- When in doubt, check if you answered all the “W” questions, and don’t focus on the act of writing



# The Dread of How Much Time This Proposal is Going to Steal from Your Life

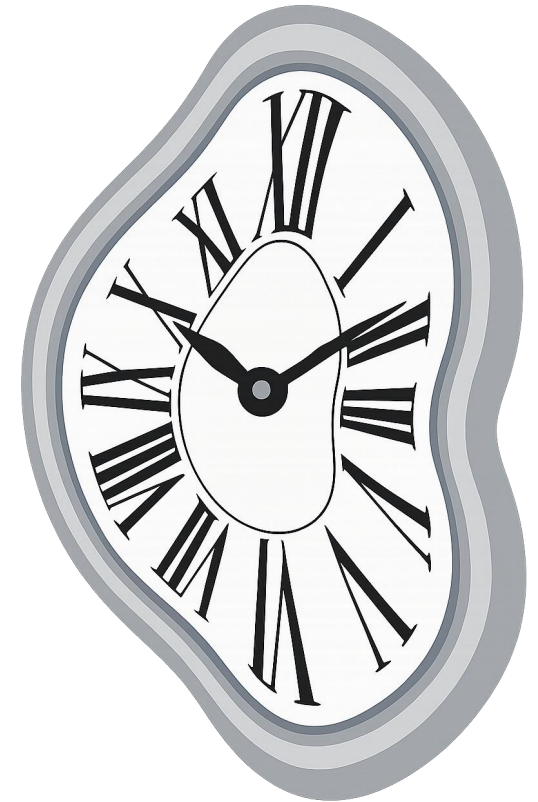


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*Many people don't write well because they dislike the very idea of how long it takes; but the correct writing process and writing in short intervals work miracles*

- Writing doesn't have to take hours; hence no need to procrastinate because of the state of overwhelm and dread
- Don't try to schedule "one solid day" or another large time slot for writing – it is hard to pull off and is unnecessary
- Schedule instead short periods of time throughout the day
  - Go for 15-20 minute intervals
  - If you feel like continuing after you got yourself started, do so
- Use your smart phone timer, and turn off the distractions such as email and phone





### Successor: On-Contract Growth that Includes Capture of Additional Scope and Projects



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Please, Complete an Assignment  
for **Module 4** Prior to Proceeding  
to the Next Module



# Module 4 Quiz



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1. Use of boilerplate helps especially when you have a hard time organizing ideas into logical order. It can speed up the process.  
a) True b) False
2. True or False? Power writing is all about using big adjectives and fancy adverbs to make your prose stand out.  
a) True b) False
3. When your brain is faster than your typing fingers, and it frustrates you, the best strategies include:  
a) Using someone else to interview you and using voice to text transcription tools.  
b) Brainstorming more and answering the 8Ws.  
c) All of the above.  
d) None of the above.
4. True or False? It's OK to temporarily silence your inner critic whenever it pops up, rather than digging into its root cause.  
a) True b) False
5. Match each block type with its recommended technique:

Block Type	Recommended Unblocking Technique
1. Hard to translate thoughts into words	a) Don't skip the brainstorming, picture the evaluator in your head, and feed flowcharts and pictorials to AI
2. Writing not well-connected to what you are trying to say	b) Get away from outlining and master mind-mapping, UNO, or Rico clusters techniques
3. Padding pages after basic idea	c) Brainstorm, answer all 8Ws, and tell anecdotes
4. Failing to find the right words	d) Don't get hung up on adjectives or adverbs, or "pretty" writing – stick to nouns & verbs





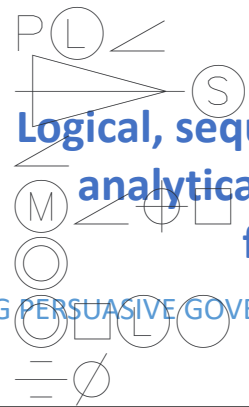
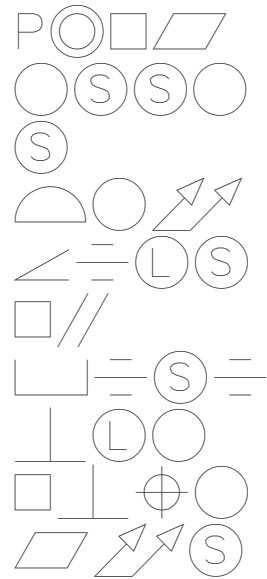
# Module 5

## Element 2: The Correct Writing Process

# Centers in Brain Hemispheres Are Responsible for Different Tasks



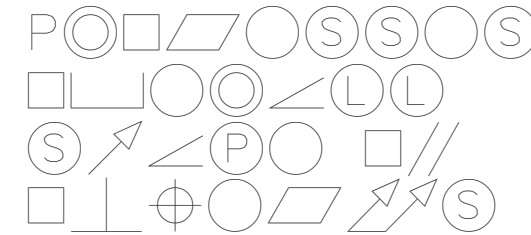
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**Logical, sequential, rational, analytical, objective, and focused on parts**



*Those stuck in the traffic jam in corpus callosum (connecting the hemispheres) will take longer to complete tasks*



**Creative, random, intuitive, holistic, synthesizing, subjective, and focused on wholes**

# The Correct Writing Process



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*The act of writing requires the shortest time in the writing process*

- Three distinct stages: when skipped or tackled out of order, they make writing painful and time-consuming
- Mixing right- and left-brained tasks is the mother of all writer's block because of how narrow the bridges are between the hemispheres



40%

RESEARCH AND  
BRAINSTORMING



20%

WRITING



40%

REWRITING AND  
EDITING



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Please, Complete an Assignment  
for **Module 5** Prior to Proceeding  
to the Next Module

# Module 5 Quiz



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1. Where are the centers you are primarily using when you are generating ideas during brainstorming?
  - a) Right hemisphere
  - b) Left hemisphere
2. Where are the centers you are primarily using when you are editing?
  - a) Right hemisphere
  - b) Left hemisphere
3. What happens when you mix the stages of writing?
  - a) You experience writer's block
  - b) You are stuck in the "traffic jam" in the corpus callosum
  - c) All of the above are correct







# Module 6

Stage 1: Research, Brainstorming, Planning  
Brainstorming in a Group

# Stage 1: Research, Brainstorming, Planning



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*Planning is the most important portion of writing – if it doesn't go well, the writing process will stall*

- **Takes at least 40% of the proposal duration**
- Includes:
  - Researching
  - Brainstorming as a group
  - Brainstorming by yourself & with AI
  - Section planning
  - Answering the “W” questions
  - Developing graphics
  - Talking through your section with a person or AI
  - Preparing storyboards or work packages



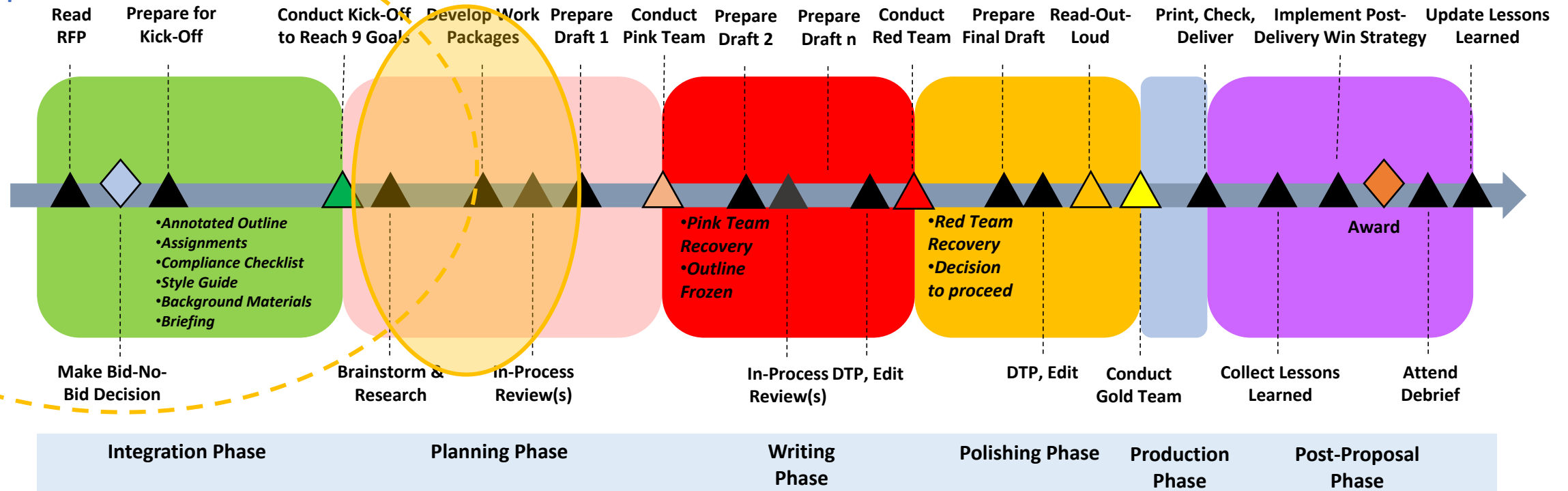
# Where Stage 1 Fits in the Proposal Process



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## Predecessor: Capture Process



Successor: On-Contract Growth that Includes Capture of Additional Scope and Projects

# Why Does it Take so Long to Prepare to Write?

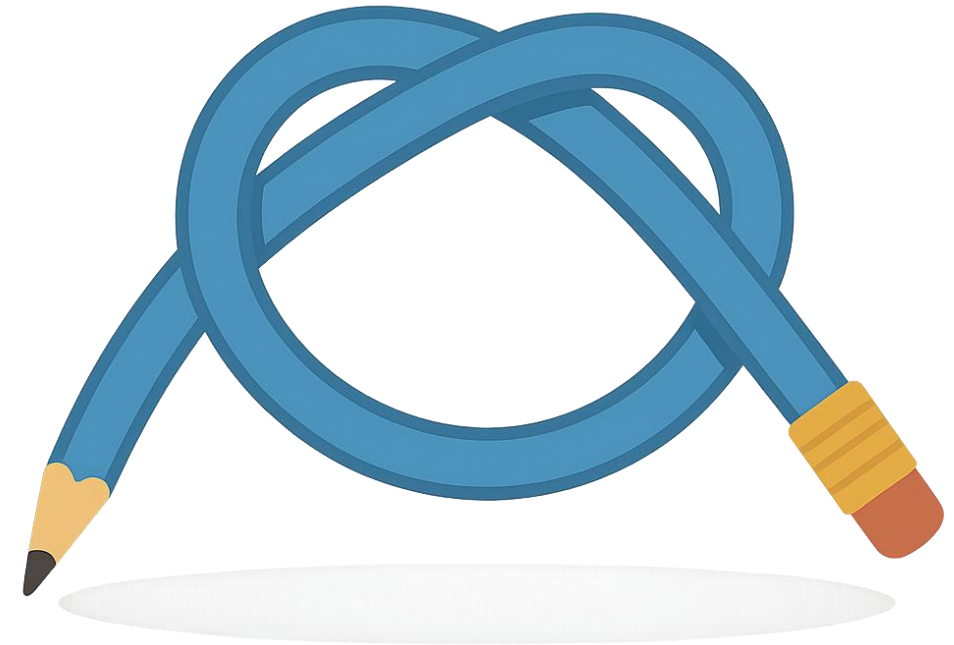


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*Thinking, planning, and research are important but can be onerous; use solution development checklists to speed up the preparation process*

- Starting to write before preparation is done leads to **writer's block**
- People don't like to feel like fakes
- It is hard to start if you can't understand:
  - What the customer is looking for
  - What is being proposed
  - Why the customer should pick your team
- Even AI can't do a good job without explicitly answering those questions first



# Brainstorming in a Group



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*Brainstorming is often under-appreciated and runs ad-hoc; instead, it should be run as a carefully planned and orchestrated session*

- Invite the right SMEs, and assign a lead (facilitator) and a time-keeper
- Have a clear agenda and process
  1. Warmup (getting your team in a creative mindset)
  2. Idea generation without judgment (chaotic)
  3. Organizing
  4. Streamlining and troubleshooting
- Keep reminding the team if left-brain dominant people become frustrated:
  - Where they are in the process
  - Where they have been
  - Where they are going





# Step 1: Warm Up



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*You may find that many good thinkers stay within the confines of their current notions until you help them produce new ideas to help beat your competition*

- Warm up and get *Creative*
- One way to warm up is to recall stories of brilliance and relive how it felt then
- How did each brainstorming participant figure out something that wasn't clear before, came up with a clever idea, fixed something tricky, or otherwise felt like a genius?
- Allocate 10 minutes for everyone to recall the stories and a few people to take no more than 2 minutes each to share
- Focus on the positive emotions and capturing the feeling of resourcefulness

## **Example of a Story of Brilliance:**

I am normally not a person who likes to repair things or even program a TV remote. But one time I was working late at night, alone in the building, trying to print a proposal for delivery. I was running behind and left myself little time to print it. It was due in the morning. The printing was going well until one of the pages got jammed in the gigantic printer. When I tried to get the paper out, it ripped and parts of it stayed in the machine. In desperation, I followed the book with troubleshooting diagrams and disassembled the whole printer into dozens of parts, got the paper out, and reassembled it. And I did it correctly! I printed the proposal, delivered it, and it won. *I still feel on top of the world when I recall this incident.*



# Step 2: Generate Ideas

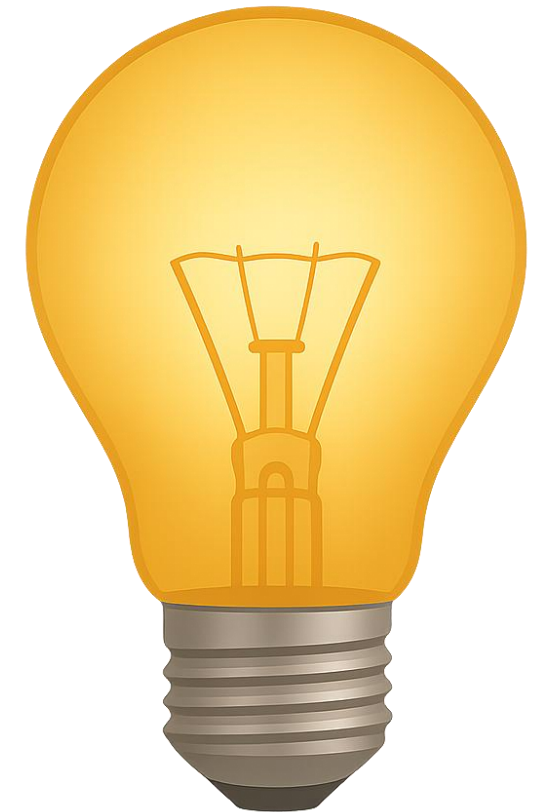


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*You may find that many good SME thinkers stay within the confines of their current notions until you help them produce new ideas to help beat your competition*

- A right-brained activity meant to generate massive quantity of ideas – any idea goes
- Go for quantity of the ideas without judging and criticizing
- Write your ideas on post its and put them up on the wall in loose order or without any order; **use transcription software to record the meeting**
- Reframe tasks: What if it were an ideal world? What if we were solving another problem?
- Identify self-limiting assumptions and reframe: “How can we...”
- Keep sense of humor
- Move about, switch up leads, embrace chaos and outlandish concepts



# Step 3: Organize and Streamline



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*This part of the brainstorming session is easier than the first for most technical personnel as it is dominated by the left hemisphere of the brain*

- Organize your post-its by major topics
- Take a photo for capturing those ideas and sharing with the writers and AI
- Sort through ideas
- Remove duplicates
- Refine and build on good ideas (record and transcribe the brainstorming discussion)



# Step 4: Troubleshoot and Add



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*8Ws ensure comprehensive approach to covering all bases in brainstorming. In writing, the order of Ws matters for greater persuasion to make your sections **compelling** by design.*

- Reorganize ideas into 8Ws and find new gaps
- Decide on how to tackle the un-addressed requirements
- Fill in the gaps
- Use AI in your transcription software to extract action items

WHY	WHAT	WHO	HOW	WHEN	WHERE	WOW



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Please, Complete an Assignment  
for **Module 6** Prior to Proceeding  
to the Next Module

# Module 6 Quiz



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1. **True or False?** Stage 1 (Research, Brainstorming, Planning) should consume at least 40 % of your total proposal duration.  
a. True b. False
2. Which of the following is *not* listed as part of Stage 1?  
a) Brainstorming by yourself and with AI  
b) Section planning and storyboarding  
c) Writing your first full draft  
d) Answering the “W” questions
3. Put these steps in the correct group-brainstorming sequence (enter numbers 1-4):  
a) Generate Ideas without judgment  
b) Warm Up with “stories of brilliance”  
c) Organize and remove duplicate post-its  
d) Troubleshoot gaps via the 8Ws
4. During “Troubleshoot and Add,” you reorganize ideas into the 8Ws. Which “W” is *not* one of the original eight?  
a) Wow  
b) Whom  
c) Why  
d) Where
5. You discover a critical requirement has no corresponding idea on your board. Your next move is to:  
a) Skip it and hope you covered it in editing  
b) Use your transcript and AI prompts to generate new bullets under the missing requirement and/or “W”  
c) Assign it to the polishing phase for later  
d) Remove a different idea to make room





# Module 7

Stage 1: Research, Brainstorming, Planning  
Brainstorming Individually



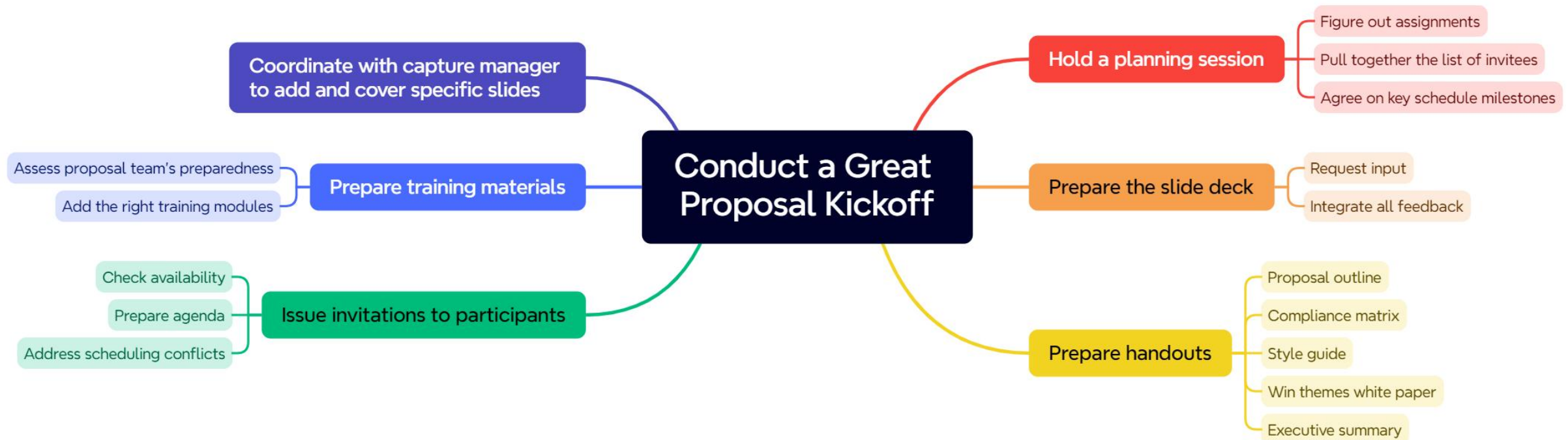
# Mind Mapping



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*Mind mapping can be fast by hand and digitized but you can use a variety of software packages and apps; Xmind and Mindjet are the best known and robust tools*



Generated using Xmind

# Proper Mind Mapping Techniques



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*Mind mapping captures the shortest-term memory in the front lobal parts of the brain – this is where the creativity resides; it's like dreams you quickly forget*

- Place the paper in the “horizontal” format – it tricks the brain to feel there is more room
- Don't outline – draw a bubble, a line, or a rectangle to write your thought inside at random
- Use the connectors to connect the thoughts – don't write floating lists
- Follow and capture thoughts naturally as they emerge – don't outline
- Relax and make random connections
- Go quickly, don't need to write everything out
- Try different mind maps for same section – for example, the WHY and the HOW; try different settings and techniques
- When ideas stop, ask: “what else?” Some of the most important ideas may emerge after you may think you are done!
- Stop when ‘itching’ to write





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Please, Complete **Exercise 1** for  
**Module 7** Prior to Proceeding to  
the Next Module

# Module 7 Exercise 1: Mind Map Rekindling a Well-Forgotten Hobby (or a Picking Up a New One)



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*Try to have fun with this exercise even if it is hard to imagine that it could come true*

- Imagine you all of a sudden got one day a week freed up with a condition to dedicate it to a hobby you are not currently into
- What hobby would you pick up?
- Mind map what you would have to do to excel in this hobby?
  - Would you have to research anything?
  - Would you have to purchase anything?
  - Would you invite anyone to part-take in it?
  - What changes would you make in your life to fully embrace your hobby?
  - What resources would you require to fund your hobby?
  - Let your mind explore...
- Take a photo and email your mind map to [service@ostglobalsolutions.com](mailto:service@ostglobalsolutions.com)



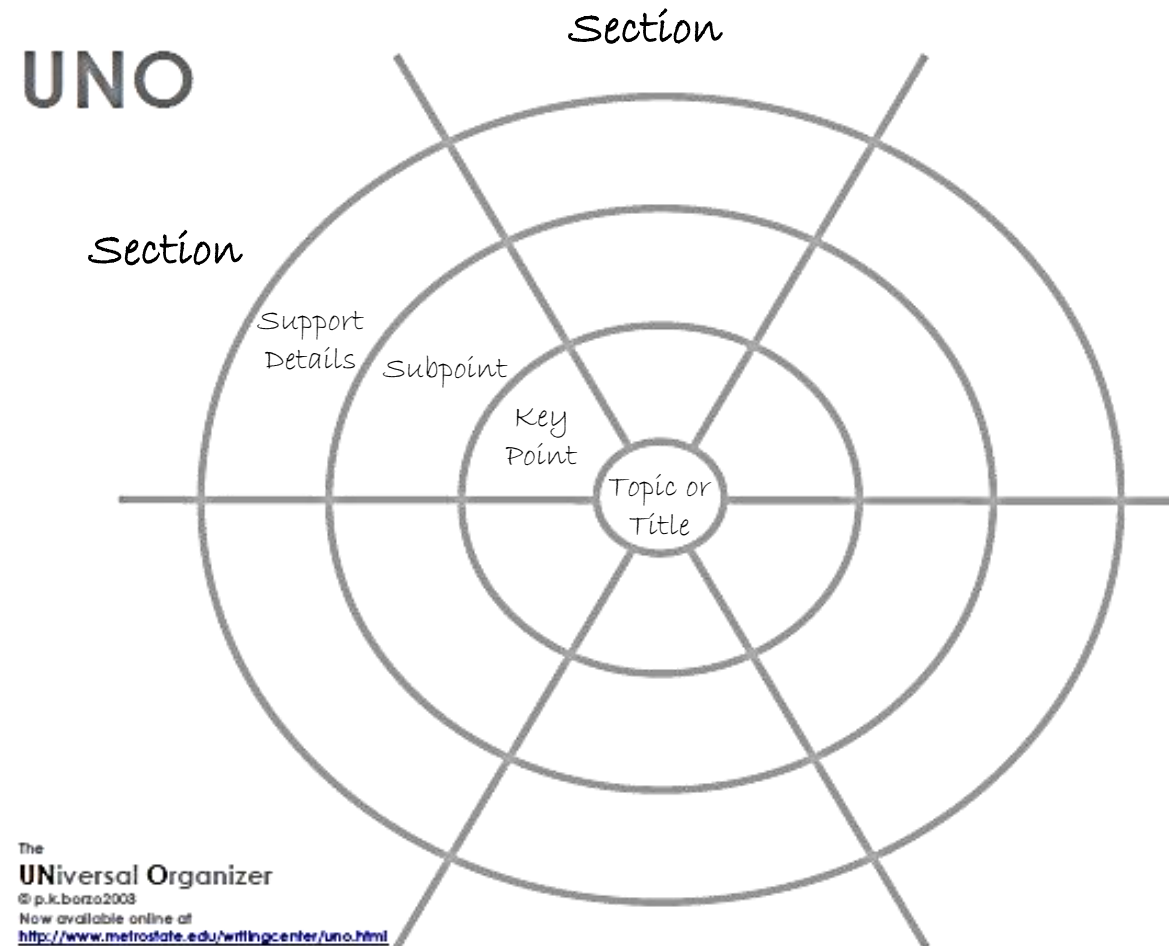
# UNiversal Organizer (UNO) – A Mind Mapping Alternative



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For those who just can't get away from structuring – it's how your brain works







# Another Alternative: Rico Clusters



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- Works when you don't know what question to ask, or what exactly to address in the section
- It is a web of related or interconnected ideas leading to one another, rather than ideas radiating out from a central concept that a mind map offers
- Is intended to leverage the brain's normal processes of communication between the right and left hemispheres
- The idea is to work towards a kind of "critical mass," where the language- and process-oriented left brain takes over from the visual- and pattern-oriented right
- Once you start seeing the pattern, you can arrive at the question to ask
- Think of the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy:  
What is the answer to Life, Universe, and Everything?  
"42"  
But what is the question?



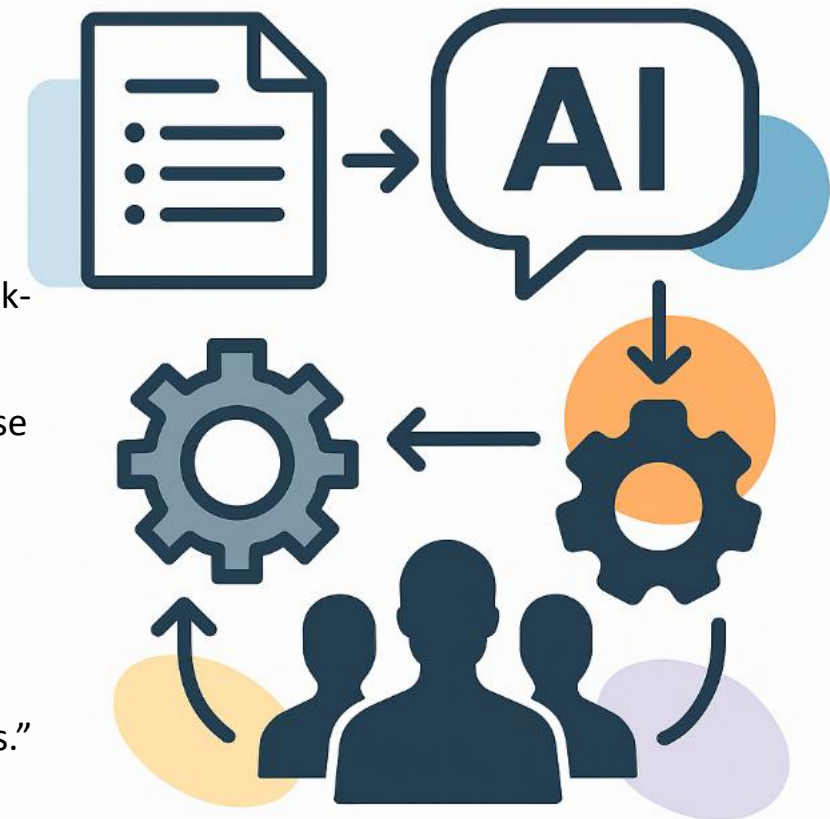
# Brainstorming with AI



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- Create a project where you can upload all the relevant documents for AI to reference
  - RFP instructions, evaluation criteria, statement of work, and other relevant documents
  - Capture documentation such as technical solution baselines
  - Capture intelligence on customer hot buttons
  - Win themes, etc.
- Ask AI to be the solution architect.
- Clarify the specific requirement to brainstorm on: Ex. “How to provide an on-site network-security test team that can surge to 95% staffing within 24 hrs?”
- Continue your prompt—include goal, roles, technologies, success metrics: “Generate 5 distinct staffing-and-toolchain concepts for rapid network security testing that meet these objectives.”
- Provide feedback, or explore ideas further: “How would we leverage automated ticket triage?”
- Capture ideas that work in a separate document or a mind map; prune low-fit ideas
- Deep-dive and detail by using the ideas you liked in a new prompt and ask AI for elaborations: “Drill into how we’d integrate a trouble-ticket API with our existing SOC dashboard” or “Outline training requirements to certify 10 network engineers in 2 weeks.”
- Ask for pros and cons tables of different approaches
- Validate and vet ideas by SMEs, and ask them to fact-check





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Please, Complete **Exercise 1** for  
**Module 7** Prior to Proceeding to  
the Next Module

# Module 7 Exercise 2: Mind Mapping a Proposal Section



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*This is an opportunity to try this approach on your brainstormed section – this is like brainstorming with yourself*

- Create the proposal section mind map using the case study to brainstorm on the solution
- Read the Page 2 of the exercise handout to get details of the story
- Make assumptions where you are missing information
- Use your creativity, understanding that your brainstorming will help you write the section later
- If you don't know some facts, make documented assumptions or use AI to help you develop ideas
- Alternatively, you can use UNO or Rico Clusters
- AVOID looking at mind mapping as another way of outlining – let your thoughts fire at random and document
- Take a photo and email your mind map to [service@ostglobalsolutions.com](mailto:service@ostglobalsolutions.com)







# Module 8

## Stage 2: Speed Writing

# Stage 2: Writing



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*This is a “fast and furious” stage that should not take long; in fact, 20% of the time is overly generous and applies to really long pieces*

- If you are not ready to write, go back to research
- Write as you would say it, say it out loud, say it simply
- **Do not write and edit**
  - You cannot go back and correct until you finish the ENTIRE section
  - Type with your eyes closed or laptop screen bent back if tempted – just check periodically on your finger positioning because you could type a page of gibberish
- It is important that you get raw ideas down on paper as fast as possible, without looking back





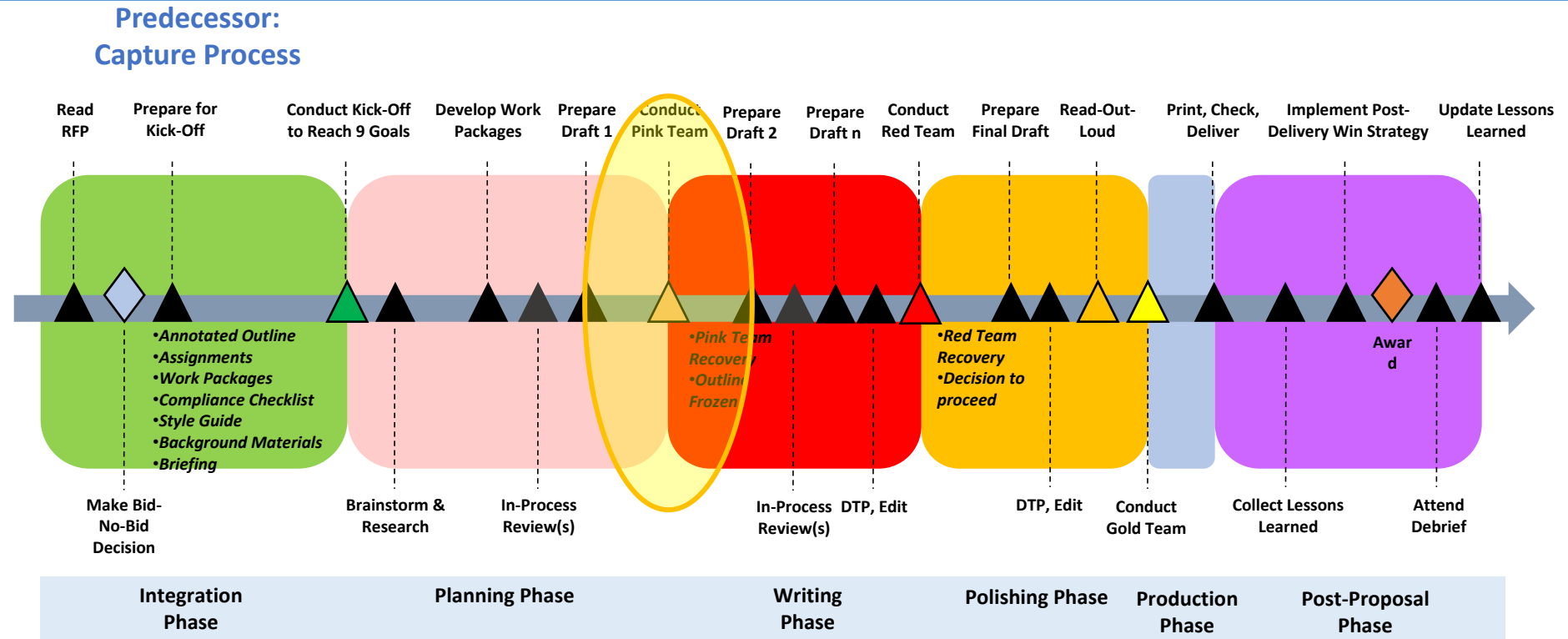
# Where Stage 2 Fits in the Proposal Process



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*As you may notice, writing itself in the proposal lifecycle is limited to developing a complete first draft, that you can then rewrite, polish, edit, and perfect in other ways*



**Successor:**  
Project Delivery Process that  
Includes Capture of Additional  
Scope and Projects

# MAIN SECRET: Allow Yourself to Be Imperfect



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*Don't worry about the way your ugly cake of a section looks – you will have an opportunity to fix it later. The most important goal is to **complete** your section.*

Allow yourself to enjoy the process of generating ugly writing like a toddler relishes getting wet and dirty in a muddy puddle!



**Bake the cake all the way to the end.  
The uglier the cake, the better!**

# Remember the Simple Writing Rules

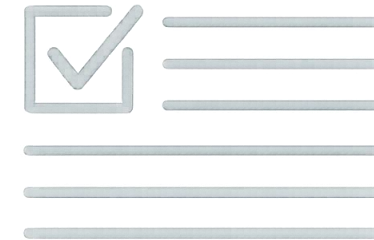


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*Most of these rules differ from what you may have learned at school; English language is alive and keeps changing*

- Write as you speak
- **Write in NOUNS and VERBS**
- **Picture your evaluators reading**
- Use personal pronouns and short words
- Contractions (don't, can't) are perfectly OK
- Use simple transitions more often than long ones:
  - *However -> but*
  - *As well as -> and*
  - *Additionally -> also*
  - *Nevertheless -> still*
  - *Consequently, therefore - > so*
- You can use transition words (And, But) to start sentences!
- Just write your section without editing or looking back





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Please, Complete an Assignment  
for **Module 8** Prior to Proceeding  
to the Next Module

# Module 8 Quiz



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1. **True of False?** Stage 2 (“Writing”) should take at least 50 % of your proposal schedule.  
a. True b. False
2. If you catch yourself editing mid-draft, you should:  
a) Delete everything and start fresh  
b) Type with your eyes closed or screen bent back so you can’t see the words  
c) Slow down and polish each sentence right away  
d) Switch to another section and never return
3. **True of False?** You should take professional pride in making sure that every paragraph you produce as a first draft is perfect right away.  
a. True b. False
4. **True of False?** When you’re not ready to write, it’s better to jump straight into editing existing text than to revisit your research or outline.  
a. True b. False
5. According to the Simple Writing Rules, which of these is *not* recommended?  
a) Starting a sentence with “And” or “But”  
b) Using short, conversational phrasing  
c) Packing every sentence with large, fancy adjectives  
d) Using personal pronouns when appropriate





# Module 9

## Element 3 of the Speed Writing System: Tools



# AI-Enabled Brainstorming



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- Try various AI platforms – from specialized proposal tools to general AI
- Each AI has its own personality and voice – try all of them
- AIs get “nerfed” to reroute compute to other tasks – don’t hesitate to switch models and platforms if you are not getting the smartest answers
- Use AI to generate diagrams, graphics, and icons
- Have AI troubleshoot AI-generated approaches
- Ask questions as if you were asking a SME



# Use Voice to Text Apps



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- Voice to text app in Windows – Windows Key + H
- Use Dragon Anywhere app or Dragon Naturally Speaking desktop software for more accurate dictation
- Use Otter.ai or Fireflies.ai (or similar app) for capturing full sentences without having to add punctuation
  - Interviews
  - Brainstorming
- Provide the rough material to AI to turn it into section text



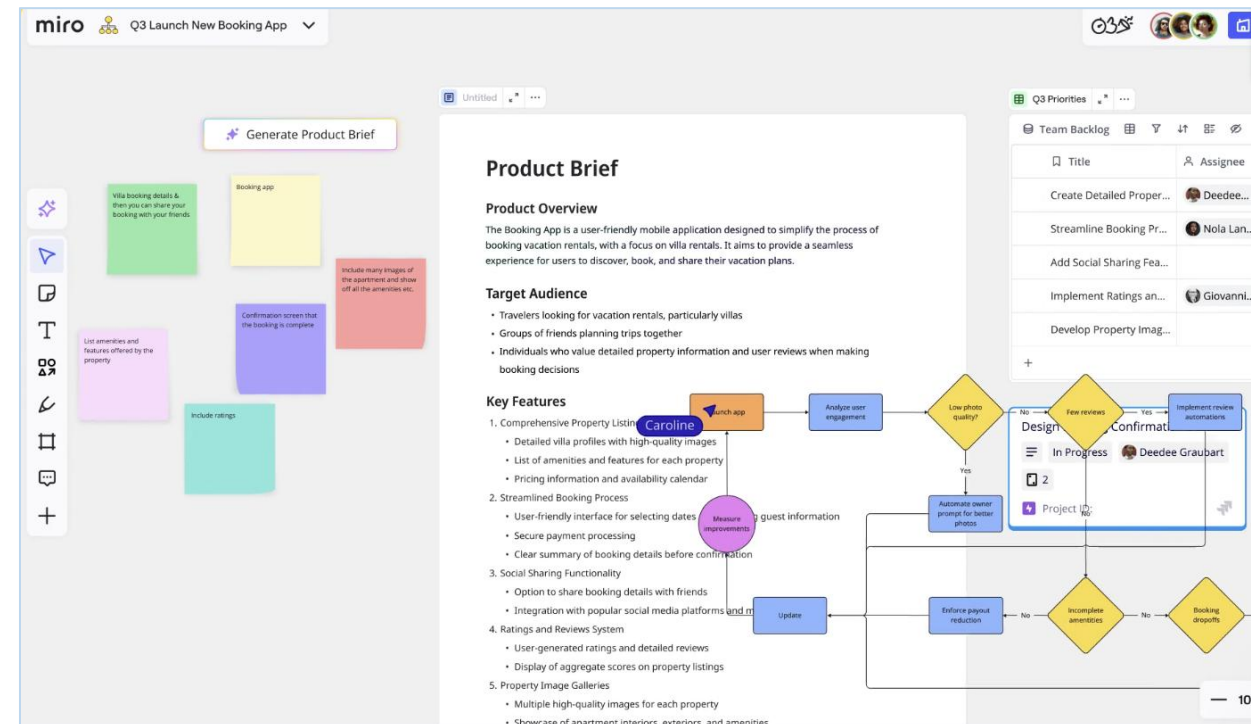
# Virtual Brainstorming Tools



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- Use Miro Board, Microsoft White Board, Trello, Asana, Mural, Lucidspark, Stormboard, Google Jamboard, or similar tools for virtual brainstorming
- Look for a tool that enables the team to have brainstorming capabilities on hand:
  - Sticky notes
  - Mind maps
  - Flowcharts
  - Kanban boards
  - Freehand drawing (whiteboarding)
  - AI-assisted idea clustering



# Writing Tools for Those Who Think Best While Typing



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## ■ FreeWrite Devices

- Write without looking and editing – but see enough to ensure you are not miskeying
- No distraction
- <https://getfreewrite.com>



Smart Typewriter



Traveler



Alpha w/ Backlight



Alpha w/o Backlight

EDITION SPECIAL EDITION SPECIAL EDITION SPECIAL ED



Hemingwrite

SPECIAL EDITION SPECIAL EDITION SPECIAL EDITION SPECIAL E



Cosmic

SPECIAL EDITION SPECIAL EDITION SPECIAL EDITION SPECIAL E



Valentine

# Writing Tools for Those Who Write Best by Hand



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- Handwrite your sections so that you are not distracted, you don't rewrite, and don't have a back button
- The notebook provides a classic pen and paper experience, but is built for the digital age
- The notebook feels traditional but is endlessly reusable and connected to your cloud services
- Use any pen from the Pilot Frixion line for your writing to stick to pages like regular paper; add a drop of water to erase everything
- Your writing is transcribed into text you can edit in Word
- <https://getrocketbook.com/>





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Please, Complete an Assignment  
for **Module 9** Prior to Proceeding  
to the Next Module



# Module 9 Exercise: Write the Mind Mapped Section



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*This is where everything you have done today comes together; feel free to use the tools provided*

- Start with prioritizing your mind map
- Write the section that you have mind mapped using Word, voice to text plus editing or AI
- Do not edit or wordsmith at all – promise you can do it later
- You have to **complete** the entire section (bake the cake all the way)



Email your sections to the instructor at  
**[service@ostglobalsolutions.com](mailto:service@ostglobalsolutions.com)**

# Recap



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*Let's go over today's material*

- Which technique for changing unhelpful beliefs about writing resonated with you the most?
- What are the three key elements of the proposal speed writing system and why are they important?
- Why are there three stages in the proper writing process, instead of just writing?
- What brainstorming tips are you going to adopt?
- Did you find the mind mapping process helpful in developing your first draft?
- What is the biggest take-away from today's class?



# Thank You! Continue Taking More Courses to Advance Your Knowledge!



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