

## The Proposal: The Engineer's Ally

### What's so important about proposal writing?

For engineers and scientists, the ability to write persuasive proposals ranks high as a measure of professional success. Here's a quote that cuts to the chase: "Successful proposals lead to jobs, products, and profit. Unsuccessful proposals lead nowhere." ("Proposals," Engineering Communication Centre web site, The University of Toronto) In other words, think of "nowhere" as an island populated by thousands of vague and unconvincing proposals baking in the hot sun.

### What is a proposal, precisely?

A proposal offers to accomplish something in a manner that convinces a targeted audience that the plan or course of action is sound and that the writer (or team) is qualified to accomplish it. A successful proposal—

- Defines the purpose of the project.
- Leads the reader through all phases of its implementation.
- Provides a timeline and a budget for its completion.

### What kinds of proposals are there?

Proposals come in all different lengths, forms, and purposes. Some are intricately formatted responses to solicited "requests for proposals," known as RFPs. Some are less rigidly structured—for instance, an employee's offer to tackle a special project or a software engineer's plan to develop a groundbreaking application. As an engineering student, your first taste of proposal writing may involve an assignment that asks you to make the most convincing case possible for proceeding with an individual or team project.

### Who reads the proposal? Multiple audiences

Most proposals have multiple audiences, including chief executives, engineers, technicians, and legal staff. Typically, the opening section of a proposal is the most generalized and openly persuasive portion of your document, written to appeal to the highest level of management. The "guts" of the proposal—the section or sections that delve into precise technical descriptions—address the most technically informed readers. In short, engineers who write proposals (check the proverbial haystack for those who don't) should strive to become agile communicators, willing and able to express their expertise to readers with a wide variety of needs and expectations.

### Summing up

While no single handout can do justice to the techniques and strategies of proposal writing, it is safe to say that a well-written proposal is an engineer's most valuable ally when it comes to making the case for themselves and their team.