

program, her readers had to agree that she would not spend that time on other work. To support the television team’s environmental project, the Department of Education had to turn down other proposals seeking the same dollars.

When deciding whether to invest resources in a project, decision makers ask questions on the following topics:

- **Problem.** Your readers will want to know why you are making your proposal and why they should be interested in it. What problem, need, or goal does your proposal address—and why is that problem, need, or goal important to them?
- **Solution.** Your readers will want to know exactly what you propose to make or do and how it relates to the problem you describe. They will ask, “What kinds of things will a successful solution to this problem have to do?” and “How do you propose to do those things?” They will examine your responses carefully, trying to determine whether your overall strategy and your specific plans are likely to work.
- **Costs.** Your readers will want to know what it will cost to implement your proposal and whether the cost will be worth it to them.

In addition, if you are proposing to perform some work (rather than supplying a product), your readers will want an answer to this question:

- **Capability.** If your readers pay or authorize you to perform the work, how will they know whether they can depend on you to deliver what you promise?

SUPERSTRUCTURE FOR PROPOSALS

The conventional superstructure for proposals provides a framework for answering those questions and includes ten topics. In some proposals you may need to include information on all ten, but in others you will need to cover only some of them. Even in the briefest proposals, however, you will probably need to treat four: introduction, problem, solution, and costs.

SUPERSTRUCTURE FOR PROPOSALS		
TOPICS	READERS’ QUESTIONS	YOUR PERSUASIVE POINTS
*Introduction	What is this communication about?	Briefly, I propose to do the following.
*Problem	Why is the proposed project needed? What will we gain that is important to us if we invest in it?	The proposed project addresses a problem, need, or goal that is important to you.

Objectives	What features will a solution to the problem need in order to be successful?	A successful solution can be achieved if it has these features.
*Solution	What will your proposed solution look like?	Here's what I plan to produce, and it has the features necessary for success.
Method Resources Schedule Qualifications Management	Are you going to be able to deliver what you describe here?	Yes, because I have a good plan of action (method); the necessary facilities, equipment, and other resources; a workable schedule; appropriate qualifications; and a sound management plan.
*Costs	What will it cost?	The cost is reasonable.
*Topics marked with an asterisk are important in almost every proposal, whereas the others are needed only in certain ones.		

Whichever question you are answering, remember the twin qualities of all workplace writing: usability and persuasiveness. To be usable, your proposal must enable your readers to find quickly and understand readily the answer to each of their questions. To be persuasive, your proposal must present each answer in a way that leads your readers to conclude that you will produce an outstanding result if your proposal is accepted. Consequently, to write a successful proposal, you must not only employ the proposal superstructure when determining your proposal's overall content and organization but also follow this book's other reader-centered strategies when selecting, organizing, and drafting each section's prose and graphics. Your goal is to lead your readers through the following sequence of thought:

Ideal sequence of readers' thoughts while reading a proposal

1. The readers learn generally what you want to do. (Introduction)
2. The readers are persuaded that there is a problem, need, or goal that is important to them. (Problem)
3. The readers are persuaded that the proposed action will be effective in solving the problem, meeting the need, or achieving the goal that they now agree is important. (Objectives, Solution)
4. The readers are persuaded that you are capable of planning and managing the proposed solution. (Method, Resources, Schedule, Qualifications, Management)
5. The readers are persuaded that the cost of the proposed action is reasonable in light of the benefits the action will bring. (Costs)

There is no guarantee, of course, that your readers will read your proposal from front to back or concentrate on every word. Long proposals usually include a summary or abstract at the beginning. Instead of reading the proposal straight