Lecture 29
Proposals

Lecture Outline:
- The variety of proposals
- Writing situations
- Proposal readers are investors
- The questions readers ask most often
- Strategy of the conventional superstructure for proposals
- Superstructure of proposals
- Introduction
- Problem
- When readers define the problem for you
- When readers provide a general statement of purpose
- When you must define the problem yourself
- Objectives
- Product
- Method
- Resources
- Schedule
- Management
- Costs

The variety of proposal writing situations
You may write proposals in a wide variety of situations. Your readers may be employed in your organization, or they may be employed in other organizations. Your readers may have asked you to submit a proposal, or you may submit it to them on your own initiative. Your proposal may be in competition against others, or it may be considered on its own merits alone. Your proposal may need to be approved by various people in your organization before you submit it to your readers, or you may submit it directly yourself. You may have to follow regulations concerning the content, structure and format of your proposal, or you may be free to write your proposal entirely as you think. Once you have delivered the proposal to your readers, they may follow any of the wide variety of methods for evaluating it.

Example: Situation 1
Helen wanted a permission to undertake a special project. She thought that her employers should develop a computer system that employees could use to reserve conference rooms. She concluded that her company needed such a system as she had arrived for a meeting several times only to find out that the room was reserved. As she is employed to write computer programs, she is well qualified to write one. However she cannot work on it without the permission of her boss. Consequently, she wrote a proposal to them.

As she wrote, she had to think about two people, her boss and her boss’s boss, who had to decide without consulting other people. Because her employers had no specific guidelines, she could use any format, structure and content to write her proposal. Furthermore she did not need anyone else’s permission to write the proposal, although she would need an approval for sending a proposal to another department.

Finally Helen did not need to worry about competition from other departments, because hers would be considered on its own merits. However her proposal had to be persuasive enough to convince her readers that her time would be better utilized than doing her regular duties.
Example: Situation 2
The second proposal was written under much different circumstances than was Helen’s. To begin with three people wrote it. The writers were a producer, a script writer and a business manager, seeking funds from a from a non-profit organization, and the federal government to produce television programs. The department learned that the Government was interested in making programs about the environment. To learn more about what Government wanted, the writers obtained copies for “requests for proposals”.

In their proposal, the writers addressed an audience much different from Helen’s. The government receives about four proposals daily, one it can fund. To evaluate the proposals it sends the proposals to experts in the country. The reviews for these proposals are reviewed by the staff of the Government. Those that receive the best response are funded.

Before the writers could even mail the proposal to the Government, they had to obtain the approval for it from several administrators at the station. That's because the proposal if accepted would be a contract between the station and the Government. By means of its approval process, the station assures its self that all the contacts it makes are beneficial to it.

Proposal Readers are Investors
The proposals written by Helen and the three writers from the TV station illustrate some of the differences between different proposal writing situations.

Despite these differences, however almost all proposal writing situations have two important features in common. (next slide) In your proposals, you ask decision-makers to invest some resources, such as time and money, so that the thing you propose can be done. Your readers will make their investment decisions cautiously. They will be accurately aware that their resources are limited, that if they decide to invest in the purchase of projects you propose, those resources will not be available for other uses.

The questions readers ask most often
As cautious investors, proposals readers ask many questions about purchases, projects, and others things proposed to them. But from situation to situation the question remain basically the same. Furthermore the answers that people at work find persuasive and satisfying are also the same type.

Problem:
Your readers will want to know why you are making the proposal and why they should be interested in it. What problems, need, or goal does your proposal address – and why is that problem, need, or goal important to them.

Solution
Your readers exactly want to know what you propose to make to do and how it relates to the problem you described. Therefore they will ask “what kind of a solution will be a successful solution to this problem has to do?” They might ask “how do you propose to do these things?” They will examine carefully your responses, trying to determine whether it is likely that your overall strategy and your specific plan will work.

Costs
What will be your proposed product or activity cost your readers – and is it worth the cost to them?

Capability
If your readers pay or authorize you to perform this work, how do they know they can depend on you to deliver what you expected?
Strategy of conventional superstructures for proposals:
The conventional superstructure for proposals is a framework for answering those questions – one that has been found successful in repeated use in the kinds of situations you will encounter on the job. When you follow this superstructure, you provide information on the up to ten topics, which will be discussed shortly. In some cases you will include information of all ten topics, but in others you will cover only some of them. Even in the briefest proposals, however you will probably need to treat the following for topics
- Introduction
- Problem
- Solution
- Costs

When you provide information on these three topics, however, you should much more than provide data. You should also try to make persuasive points. The following slide describes the persuasive points for each of the ten superstructures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Your reader’s questions</th>
<th>Your persuasive points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>What is the communication about?</td>
<td>Briefly, I propose to do the following</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem</td>
<td>Why is the proposed project needed?</td>
<td>The proposed action addresses a problem that is important to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>What features will a solution to this problem need in order to be successful?</td>
<td>A successful solution must achieve the following objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product</td>
<td>How do you propose to do those things?</td>
<td>Here is what I plan to produce and how it will work effectively at achieving the objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method, Resources, Schedule, Qualifications, Management</td>
<td>Are you going to be able to deliver what you described here?</td>
<td>Yes, because I have a good plan of action; the necessary facilities, equipment etc...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs</td>
<td>What will it cost?</td>
<td>The cost is reasonable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you write, you will need to see the relationships among the ten topics. Think of them as a sequence in which you lead your readers through the following progression of thoughts:
The readers learn generally what you want to do. (Introduction)
The readers are persuaded that there is a problem, need, or goal that is important to them. (Problem)
The readers are persuaded that the proposed action plan will be effective in solving the problem, meeting the need, achieving the goal that readers now agree is important (objectives)
The readers are persuaded that you are capable of planning and managing the proposed solution. (Method, resources, schedule, qualifications and management)
The readers are persuaded that the cost of the proposed action is reasonable in the light of the benefits the action will bring. There is no guarantee that your readers will actually read your proposal from front to back or concentrate on each and every word you write.
Consider how readers approach long proposals.
Each volume of your proposal is evaluated by a different set of experts, specializing in their own domains. Even when readers will not read your proposal straight through, the account given above of the relationships among the parts can help you. You can write, keeping them in mind a tightly focused proposal in which all the parts support one another effectively.

Various lengths of proposals
The preceding discussion mentions proposals that are several volumes long. Such proposals can run into hundreds or even thousands of pages. On the other hand some proposals are less than a page. How do you know how long your proposals should be? Sometimes you can be brief and still very persuasive. Often you will need to touch upon only few of the ten items listed in the table described before.

For instance Helen’s’ proposal involved only one person Helen. Similarly, her proposal didn’t need any management plan because her readers were already aware of her abilities as a writer of programs. She didn’t have to say anything about them, except perhaps say a few words about the experience she had in writing such programs. And because she was asking only two weeks time to prepare the program; she didn’t have to present a detailed budget report, though she needed to justify her proposal schedule.

In other situations such as writing to NASA or some other big department you need to write lengthy proposals. Those proposals will be long as you would need to address the ten topics, and your discussion of each of these topics must answer fully the questions you have. In the end then how to decide how long a proposal should be, you must think about your readers, anticipating their questions and their reactions to what you are writing.

Superstructure for proposals
In the remaining of the lecture we will describe in detail each of the ten topics that form the conventional superstructure for proposals. As you go along, keep in mind that the conventional superstructure represents only a general plan. You must use your imagination and creativity to adapt it effectively to your particular situation. In addition, as you plan and write your proposal, remember that the ten topics identify the kinds of information you need to provide, not necessarily the titles of sections you will include. In brief proposals, some parts take only a sentence or a paragraph, so that several are grouped together.

For example, writers often combine their announcements of their proposal, their discussion of the problem, and their explanation of the objectives under a single heading which might be “Introduction”, “Problem” or “Need”. Also remember that the conventional superstructure may be used with any of the three common formats:

1. Letters
2. Memos
3. Books

While writing your proposal, you should have sufficient information about the particular format you are going to see.

Introduction
At the beginning of a proposal you want to do the same thing that you do at the beginning of anything else you write in the job. Tell your readers what you are writing about. In a proposal this means announcing what you are proposing. How long and detailed should the introductory announcement be? In proposals the introductory announcements vary considerably in length but are almost always very brief. By custom the writers reserve the full custom of what they propose until later, after they have discussed the problem that their proposal will help to solve. You may be able to introduce your proposal in a single sentence. Helen did this in her proposal. I request a permission to spend two weeks writing, testing and implementing a program for scheduling conference rooms. When you propose something more complex than a two-week project, you may need more words to introduce it. In addition sometimes you may
need to provide background information to help your readers understand what you have in mind.

**Problem**
Once you have announced what you are proposing, you must persuade your readers that your proposed action will address the problem significant to them. Your description of the problem is crucial to the success of the proposal. You must not only define the problem but also make the problem seem relevant to the readers. When the readers define the problem for you, you need to do the least research. This can happen when the reader has asked you to submit the proposal.

In such a situation your primary purpose in describing the problem will be to show your readers that you thoroughly understand what they want. When readers provide the general statement of the problem. At other times you will need to devote research and creativity in writing a proposal. When you are such in a situation, you should find out what sort of problem your readers will consider important. In some situations, you may not have the aid of explicit statements from your readers to help you formulate the problem. This is most likely to happen in you are preparing a proposal on your own initiative, without being asked someone else to submit it.

**Product**
When you describe the product your proposal will produce, you explain your plan for achieving the objectives you told your readers about. The describe your product persuasively, you need to do three things

- Tell you readers how you reach your objectives
- Secondly you provide enough details to satisfy your reader
- Thirdly you explain the desirability of the product of your project

**Method**
The decision makers who act upon proposals sometimes need to be assured that you can in fact, produce the results you promise. That happens especially in situations where you are offering something that takes special expertise – something to be customized or created only if your proposal is approved.

**Resources**
By discussing the facilities, equipment, and other resources to be used for your project proposal, you assure that your readers will use whatever special equipment required doing the job properly. If part of your proposal is to request the equipment, tell your readers what you need to acquire and why.

**Schedule**
People who read or listen to your proposals have several reasons for wanting to know the schedule of your plan. The most common way to present a schedule is to provide a schedule chart. The details of schedule charts will be discussed in future lectures.

**Qualifications**
When they are thinking in investing in your project, proposal readers want to be sure that the proposers have experience and capability to carry out the project properly. For that reason, a discussion of the qualifications of the personnel involved with the project is a standard part of most proposals.
Management
When you propose a project that will involve more than about four people, you increase the persuasiveness of your proposal by describing the management structure of your group. That’s because proposal readers know that even qualified people cannot work effectively if their activities are not coordinated.

Costs
When you propose something, you are asking the readers to invest resources, usually money and time. Naturally you need to tell them how much the project will cost. In some proposals you may demonstrate the reasonableness of the proposal by also calculating the savings that will result from your project.