



Sales Proposal

A sales proposal offers a product or service to a potential client. It is a persuasive document and every effort should be made to create a reader-friendly document: rely upon organization, editing skills, and typography.

1. **Purpose:** This important document has two purposes:
 - A. To persuade the reader that your service or product is valuable.
 - I. Explain the strengths, costs, and quality of your product.
 - II. Compare your service or product with what your audience is currently using.
 - B. To persuade the reader that your firm is the one for the job.
 - I. Prove that your company is qualified.
 - II. Stress the advantages that your company has over the competition.

2. **Characteristics:** A sales proposal typically makes a logical appeal, supported with facts, statistics, and examples. A sales proposal may be made in response to a request for proposal (RFP) or on your company's own initiative. A typical sales proposal will do the following:
 - A. Provide a detailed consideration of the specific benefits that the client will receive from the product or service.
 - B. Focus on both the primary audience (decision-makers) and secondary audiences (technical experts who will evaluate specific aspects of the proposal and make recommendations to the decision-makers).

3. **Short Proposals:** There is no single way to write a sales proposal; some may require hundreds of pages, while others may be as short as a page or two. However, proposal writers should scrupulously follow the document specifications required by the business or agency whose business they seek. For instance, a proposal seeking a Department of Agriculture contract should comply with the agency's preferences as stated in its request for proposals. Absent specific directions to the contrary, a short sales proposal (several pages) may proceed according to the following generalized organizational flow:
 - A. Introduce the reasons for the proposal:
 - I. State the purpose of the document.
 - II. Describe the problem or opportunity that the document will address, including facts that will allow the audience to appreciate the benefits of solving the problem.
 - B. In body paragraphs, describe the details of your plan for solving the problem or addressing the opportunity.
 - C. Present the specific service or product that you are offering.
 - D. Include a schedule for delivering the product or completing the work. For longer jobs, the schedule may be broken down into phases, each with its own time element.
 - C. List the materials that you plan to use and to provide a breakdown of major costs.
 - D. End by emphasizing the benefits of your product or service, seeking to distinguish it from any offers that may have been submitted by competitors.
 - E. You may express appreciation for the opportunity to present the proposal.



- F. You may encourage the potential client to contact you for additional information.

Note: An invitation to bid may require a somewhat different response than does a request for a proposal. Proposals stress professional qualifications for the job, whereas bids generally are awarded primarily on the basis of the price of the service or product.

4. Longer Proposals (Refer to the Formatting Your Proposal resource): Longer sales proposals (which may run one hundred pages or more) often require a different, more protracted structure to handle the greater bulk of this type of document. Although forms may vary depending on purpose, audience, and the requirements set out in a request for proposals, a typical long-form proposal likely includes more sections than a short proposal, with each section devoted to a specific topic. Generally, a long-form sales proposal may proceed according to the following generalized organizational flow:

- A. Front Matter—An opening section that may include the following:
 - I. Cover letter
 - II. Title page that provides specific information
 - III. Table of contents
 - IV. List of figures
 - V. An executive summary providing a brief summary of the main points to come
- B. Introduction—Describes the following:
 - I. The purpose of the proposal (to solve a problem or address an opportunity for the client)
 - II. The monetary information
 - III. The product or service
 - IV. Relevant background information
- C. Body Section 1: Problem—Describes the following:
 - I. The problem or opportunity
 - II. Relevant background of the problem or opportunity
 - III. The causes and effects of the problem
- D. Body Section 2: Plan
 - I. Lays out the scope of your proposal, describing what you intend to do.
 - II. Identifies and describes the steps of the plan and the ultimate solution that you intend to deliver.
- E. Body Section 3: Qualifications
 - I. Details the experience and training that your firm and key personnel can bring to the project. Academic or professional credentials establish credibility, as does past experience on similar projects.
 - II. Include short profiles of key members of the project team to highlight the particular expertise that they bring to the project.
- F. Body Section 4: Budget
 - I. Estimate the cost of the project. It may be good strategy to break down major cost components.



- II. Present the cost as part of a cost-benefit analysis that also considers the costs that the client will incur if the current problem continues, contrasting the cost of doing nothing with the benefits of moving forward with the solution you have proposed.
 - G. Conclusion:
 - I. Ask for approval to proceed with the project.
 - II. Express gratitude.
 - III. Include contact information so readers can reach you with any questions.
 - H. Back Matter: A closing section, or appendix, that may include a variety of information too detailed to fit within the body of the paper. This section may include the following:
 - I. A detailed schedule of work, showing what tasks will be accomplished in what time frame
 - II. Certain charts
 - III. References you have used in compiling information for the proposal
 - IV. A glossary for technical terms
- 5. Style and Conventions:** Sales proposals may include many of the features common in other business documents, such as graphics, section headings, lists, and pull-quotes.