



Making Your Proposal Stand Out from the Crowd

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Objectives

Make your proposal stand out in a pile

- Intellectually
- Visually



<https://hk.jobsonline.com/en-hk/articles/stand-out-from-the-crowd>

Language

Use conversational language

- Use simple words
- Aim for 7th to 8th grade reading level

Eschew jargon

Language

Use conversational language

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~~Eschew~~ Avoid jargon

Write short, descriptive sentences

- General rule, a sentence that does not go over 2 – 3 lines

Write shorter paragraphs, too

Tip: Try reading segments of your proposal out loud.
Does It sound natural and engaging or stiff and formal?

Language



Here's your reviewer

He is a world expert

He's been at a conference in Russia for a week

Last night was the farewell banquet, at which many obligatory toasts were made

and drunk

He has to read your proposal on the flight back from Moscow, which has been delayed for 5 hours so far -

Which would he rather read?

When the ER fluid is driven far from equilibrium by a strong E-field, it may exhibit a spontaneous collective behavior, such as emergence of avalanches and chain formation. Previous studies were suggestive that these processes lead to maximization of the entropy production rate.⁴⁰ A different suspension of conducting particles causes the ER fluid to evolve towards quasi-stable states characterized by the maximum (or near-maximum) rate of entropy increase in a wide range of excitation parameters. The evolution usually proceeds in two phases: an "avalanche" phase followed by a "stable" phase, which onsets when the entropy generation reaches its pre-determined maximum. Close to the end of the avalanche phase self-assembled dissipative structures can start to exhibit quasi-periodic motion and deformation. This self-assembled structure, which takes energy from the biased electrodes, halts its motion as soon as the entropy production in the ER fluid reaches the maximum.

6 sentences, 25 words/sentence

1 paragraph (wall of text)

Reading level-15.9

Carbon nanotubes are suspended in a non-conducting, non-polar fluid. Next, the system is driven far out of equilibrium by applying a strong electric field. Once electrically charged, conducting carbon-nanotube chains spontaneously self assemble. The system of interacting chains evolves toward maximum entropy⁴⁰ through two distinct intermediate states—an "avalanche" state and a stable state.

In the avalanche regime, the conductive chains align themselves according to the polarity of the applied voltage, allowing the system to carry current and thus to dissipate heat and produce entropy. The chains appear to sprout appendages as the nanotubes align and join adjacent parallel chains, effectively increasing entropy production.

In the second, relatively stable stage of evolution of these structures, the entropy production rate reaches maximum or near maximum, and no destructive avalanches are observed in this quasi-stable regime.

7 sentences, 20 words/sentence

3 paragraphs (digestible)

Reading level – 14.0

Project Summary

- The program officer uses it for a first administrative cut
- First thing reviewers are likely to read



Engage the reviewer

Organize/structure

- Why this problem/issue?
- What are your aims?
- What's new, interesting, better, cheaper about your approach?
- How will you know if you've succeeded in your mission?
- What is special about your team? (expertise)
- What is special about your institution? (support, facilities)

Engage the reviewer

- Position important points strategically- beginning and end
 - Make it easy for busy reviewer to pick up on important points
- “Overview” or “Goals” section at the beginning
- “Summary” section at the end
- Weave merit review criterion into at least three different places in proposal
 - Power of repetition





Include some surprises in your project narrative*

Qualifications of key personnel

A figural timeline for the project

Contributions to research infrastructure and human resources at your institution

Plans for sustainability (how will you continue your work when this grant expires?)

*but pay attention to mandatory sections and page limits

Figures and Graphics

Here's your reviewer
She is a world expert and is
very busy



She's gotten up early in the morning to read your proposal
She's stayed up late at night to read it
She's reading your proposal over other tasks

Figures and Graphics

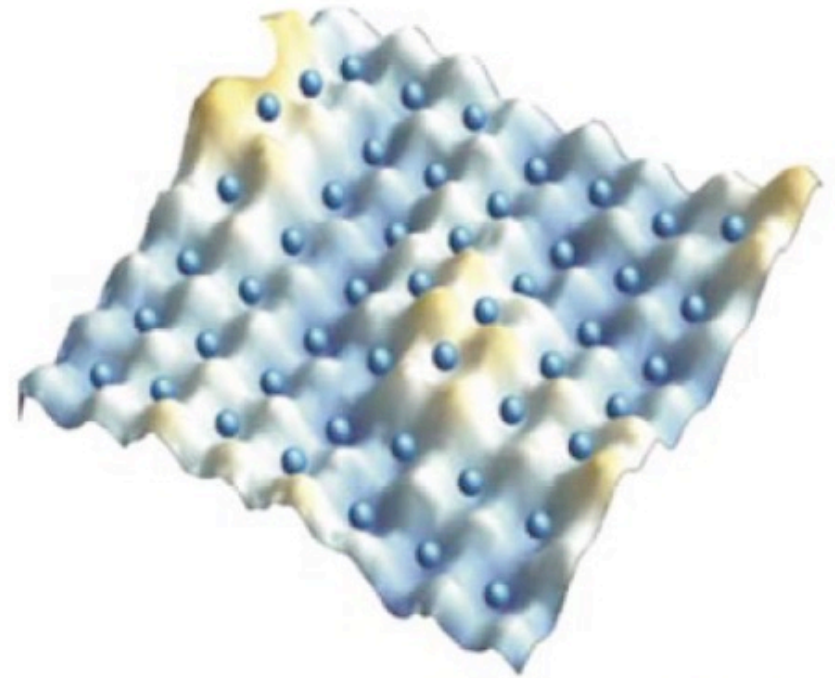
Engage the reviewer

Emphasize key points

Provide supporting evidence

Help explain complex ideas
and relationships quickly

Give the reviewer something
to remember



Rubidium atoms isolated in an optical lattice
Courtesy B. DeMarco

Figures and graphics pop quiz

What are five reasons to add figures and graphics in your proposal?

What do you remember most from the previous slide?

Make your narrative scannable

Adding figures to your proposal engages reviewer interest, emphasizes key points, provides supporting evidence, explains complex ideas and relationships quickly, and gives the reviewer something to remember.

Adding figures to your proposal promotes

- reviewer interest,
- emphasizes key points,
- provides supporting evidence,
- explains complex ideas quickly, and
- gives the reviewer something to remember

Headings and Sub-headings

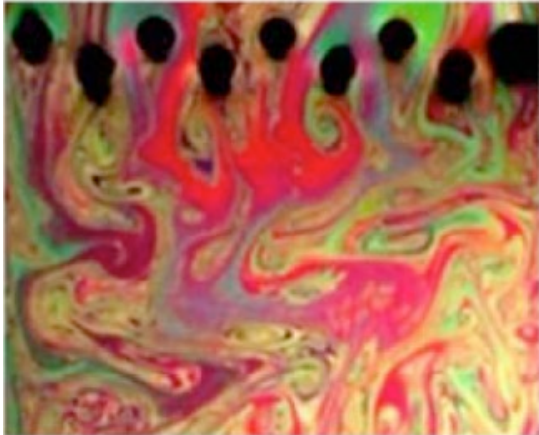
Use them

- Judiciously and effectively

Use descriptive, content-rich headings

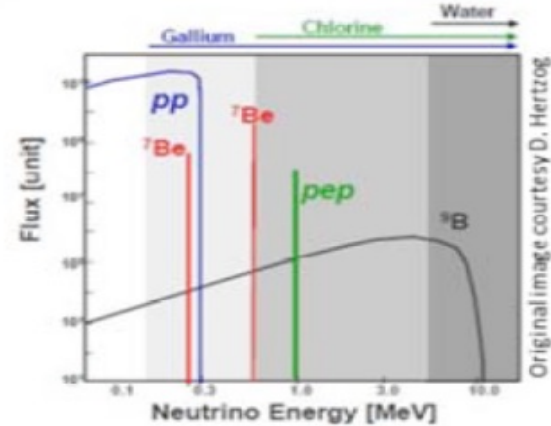
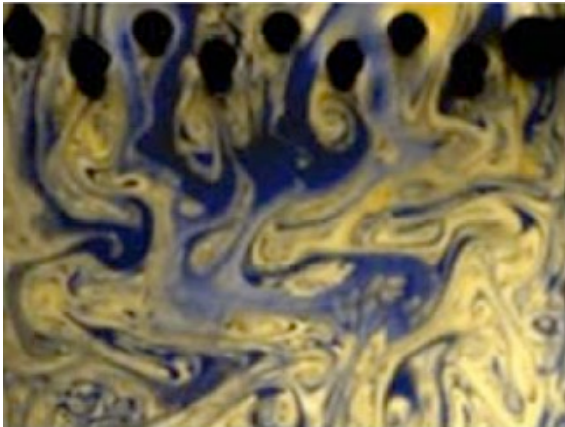
- Standard technical section headings
 - Background and Introduction
 - Experimental Set-Up
 - Expected Results
- Content-rich headings
 - What we still don't know about high-temperature superconductors
 - Novel Scanning SQUID Microscope
 - Effects on helping behavior

Use color...but judiciously



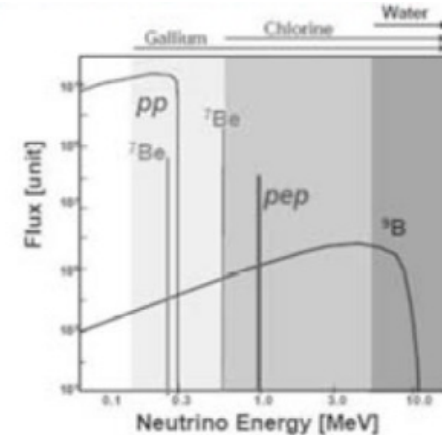
Original image courtesy N. Goldenfeld

*Approx. 8% of males and 5% of females are red-green colorblind.



Original image courtesy D. Hertzog

*They'll print your proposal on b&w printers



Make important points pop off the page

Use graphical highlighting

- **Color**
- **Boldface**
- *Italics*
- a different font*

If it's important, make it **bigger**

- Indent it

Center it and set it off
with extra white space

*If allowed-READ the proposal preparation instructions

Provide "quotable" statements

Find the review criteria

Address each explicitly in your narrative

Present your answers in the same order in the summary and the narrative

Make it easy for the reviewer to write a positive, compelling review

End with a bang

don't just trail off at the end ...

Add a "summary" section

- Remind the reviewer of the importance of the problem
- Recap your expertise and the likelihood of your team's success
- Reiterate the expected results and their importance
- Underline the benefits of your project to the funding agency

Leave the reviewer with a strong positive last impression

To recap...

Enliven your proposal with

- conversational language
- strategic positioning and emphasis of important points
- unexpected extras
- lots of figures
- descriptive, meaningful section headings

Make your proposal memorable by including

- Introductory overview
- lots of figures
- scannable text
- graphical highlighting
- quotable quotes
- summary



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/9555503@N07/5096020716>

Questions, or comments?