



How to: Write a Proposal

This guide covers:

- General skeleton for what to include in a proposal
- Specifics on applying for: Funding/Grants
Residencies
Exhibitions
Community Projects/Events
- Our top tips, including Shae's Project Bank Template



The purpose of a proposal is usually to describe a project you'd like to carry out. You might be asked to write a proposal for a number of reasons. It's usually a key element of applications for things like:

Funding + grants
Residencies
Exhibitions
Events/community projects

Each opportunity will require different information; for example, when writing a proposal to a gallery to have a solo show, you might want to consider describing how the viewer might experience the work. Or if you're applying to carry out a project during a residency, you will need to address what the residency offers you in particular. On the note of residency proposals, [here's](#) a great example I found!

Remember it's crucial that you tailor each proposal to the opportunity you're applying for, and make sure to consider everything they stipulate in the description. I always find it helpful to write a short bullet point list of everything that the opportunity requests at the top of the doc I'm working on, just to break it down and ensure I don't miss anything. Like this:

Proposal Question Example:

Description of the project you would like to investigate, including the conceptual basis, content, art forms used.

Description of the project (500 words)

- ~ conceptual basis
- ~ content
- ~ art forms used

While writing my first draft, I would start off by answering these elements of the proposal, then go back and flesh out my idea with more context. Then I would double check in the editing process that I've covered all their stipulations.

Happy proposal writing!!

J&J xo



Part I: The skeleton of your proposal

A description of the project

One or two sentences explaining the physical details of the project, being as specific as you can. Make sure this is as compelling and unique as your idea! **Really try to hook the reader in the early stages of the proposal to ensure they want to keep reading!**

Sometimes, call outs for proposals will welcome or even prefer you to be in the early stages of idea development, others might require you to have fully formed ideas. Check the submission guidelines, or get in touch with the organisation if you're unsure! It never hurts to ask!

A bit about the themes/context of the project

This can include describing things like what you were initially inspired by or the research you've carried out so far. Giving the project context shows that you've really considered this idea and that you're **serious about taking it further.**

Describe the work you want to make in more detail

If you're proposing to make a film, how long do you imagine it might be? What will the aesthetic be? If you're making a series of sculptures, what form will they take? How big will they be? **Talk about specific elements that make your project unique.**

Tying this part of your proposal back to the themes/context you've just mentioned is also so helpful in ensuring that the reader can visualise the project.

Tell the reader what stage you're at with the project as it stands, as well as what you'd like to do with it in the future (if appropriate)

Be honest about whether you're in the research stage, or if you've already started experimenting with materials and processes (if you have, you can briefly tell them what you found!) or if you're building on from previous work. If you're applying for funding to complete a series of paintings, do you envisage that they're exhibited in a solo show in the future? *Showing that you're ambitious, committed, and have a real desire to take your practice further is key to a successful proposal.*

How will the funding/residency help you to bring your idea

This is your chance to **tie your idea directly into the opportunity** you're applying for. How will it benefit you? What will you do with the money/specific opportunities they describe?



Part 2: Specifics

Specifics for Applying for Funding/Grants

- When writing a proposal for a funding opportunity or grant, you want to be as crystal clear and concise as possible. Even if you haven't fully flushed out the concept yet, make sure what you do have makes sense!
- Once you've done that, the most important thing you can do here is *budgeting!* What exactly do you need to complete your proposed project? Break down any and all costs, then divide those into what you want this grant to pay for, what another grant could cover and what you can pay for yourself.

Specifics for Applying for a Residency

- Residencies can be totally open-ended regarding your output but can be super specific in what they can provide for you. Some will expect a finished work or body of work ready to exhibit at the end or some are just for you to research and develop an idea with no expectation of a resolved work. Some are specific to painters, whereas some are specific to outdoor sculpture installations. Some are local or abroad, some are paid or unpaid, some are a week and some are 6 months. My point with this is that you can find a million residencies each with different things they can offer you. Make sure you are not only tailoring your proposal to a specific residency but finding a residency that can be tailored to your project.

Specifics for Applying for an Exhibition

- Download a floor-plan of the gallery and plot out what proposed works will go where and explain a little bit about why
- Describe how your work is going to fit into that gallery space - this could be in a conceptual or literal sense (or both!). For example:
 - conceptually: maybe this is a gallery that focuses funding into climate awareness and so does your practice, this would be a great time to point out how your work would fit into the ethos of that particular gallery
 - literally: perhaps you're making a large hanging work that needs to be suspended from 20 ft off the ground and this gallery space has massive high ceilings. Mention that your work has installation specificities that can be met at this gallery



Specifics for Applying for an Event/Community Project

- For this one, you'll definitely want to include all logistical considerations in your proposal. This would include but not limited to: timing (duration, time of day), location, audience participation, impact, materials, setup, safety/risk assessment (when involving the public), reception, etc.
- Something key to think about with this as well is answering questions like: "what can I bring to this opportunity?" and "How will this project benefit my community?"

Part 3: Top tips!

1. It's important to consider that the reader will probably not be familiar with your practice, so make sure your proposal is clear and concise. I always find it helpful to send/read out my proposals to someone who hasn't heard my idea yet in order for them to spot anything that's unclear or needs development/explained further.
2. This is your chance to communicate your ideas and intentions, but it's so important to be realistic and honest in your proposal. Be optimistic, and once you've written your final draft, look over it and think "*if I did get this funding/residency, can I actually fulfil what I'm proposing?*"
3. I have recently been applying for lots of opportunities for my personal practice, and have realised how much time it takes up!! I decided to make a Google Doc titled "*Project Bank*" where I collated all my ideas that I haven't been able to fulfil from the last several years. After trolling through my sketchbooks, notes on my phone and laptop, and wracking my brain for pretty much all the unresolved ideas I've ever had, I've begun working on pre-writing the skeleton of my proposals, in line with the structure included in Part One. As much as this was initially intended to make writing applications easier and faster, it's actually been so helpful to start getting everything noted down in one place. The formula I've been using is:



Project Title: this can just be a working title or something that triggers your memory as to what it is if you haven't settled on one yet!

Medium: what kind of art you're imagining the project will be

Summary: you're usually asked to summarise the project in a few words (typically 20-25 words). I've found it helpful to have two versions, one that is only one sentence, and one that is two, just so you can copy paste into applications!

Proposal: this should be a detailed description of your proposal. Follow the structure laid out in Part One of this support doc. Try to make it around 500 words, since this can be cut down or expanded upon depending on what the stipulations of the application is.

Budget/equipment: this can take a lot of time, but it's important to consider. For my Project Bank so far, I've just been listing the things that I would need to acquire or pay for just to get a head start in case I'm ever asked!

Supporting material/imagery: I've been creating folders in my Google Drive that I can link here, with all the files named appropriately.* Again, a massive time-saver!

**It's also SO important that you're not sending your files with names like UntitledArtwork01.jpeg or IMG.3023 or Screenshot.2020-04-08.17.55.45 because this is really unprofessional and makes the life of the recipient so much harder. They'll have to sift through so many files, and yours might get lost in the works if they're not labelled properly. I usually go with something like: Name_Title.jpeg if they haven't requested anything in particular.*

Examples:

Shae_Myles_Cherry_Shakes.jpeg

Shae_Myles_Victory_Bread.jpeg

Once you've formulated all your ideas, you can easily edit and pull from them to insert directly into applications.

I've made a Project Bank template for you to use: 🖱️🖱️🖱️🖱️🖱️🖱️🖱️

[J&J Project Bank - Template](#)



Well, that's a wrap! We really hope this has been helpful in giving you some ideas for your next proposal, and if it has, we'd love to hear your feedback! Let us know what works for you, and if you have any questions or need a second pair of eyes to look over an application, don't hesitate to get in touch!

Remember these are some tips to get you started, and that we're both learning and growing with you! If you think we missed anything in this guide, just let us know!

Lots n lots of luv,
Shae and Georgia xo

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