

## Parker Derrington Ltd

33 Dovecot Road  
Edinburgh  
EH12 7LF  
T: 07952 154999  
E: enquiries@parkerderrington.com  
W: www.parkerderrington.com

Getting to Grips with Grant Applications  
University of Wales, Trinity St David  
May 8th 2017

### Programme

13:00 .....[Questions to Answer Before You Start](#)  
13:15 .....[What a Grant Application has to Achieve](#)  
14:00 .....[The Sales Pitch](#)  
14:30 .....[The Magic Formula](#)  
15:00 .....[The Recipe](#)  
15:30 .....[SubProjects](#)....[Aims and Objectives](#)....[Writing Guidelines](#)....[Strategy](#)  
16:00 .....Finish

### Introduction

This course tells you how to get working on an extremely efficient 'recipe' for writing an application for a research project grant, such as a research council standard grant.

The course deals with the following issues:-

- Writing a grant application is very difficult unless you design a fundable project before you start. We will discuss how you can assess whether you have a project that is fundable.
- The way funding decisions are made imposes very strict (but unacknowledged) requirements on a grant application.
- It is possible to work out what properties a case for support needs to have to meet all the requirements.
- We will discuss how the case for support in a grant application can work as a sales pitch.
- We will discuss a 'recipe' a step-by-step guide to writing a document that meets all the requirements for success.
- We will discuss how you can compose a set of aims and objectives that will strengthen your chance of getting funded.
- We will discuss how the requirements of a grant application dictate writing style, and some common academic writing habits that you need to eliminate from your grant applications.

My delivery style is interactive, so feel free to ask questions throughout the day. This handout contains all the visual material to be used during the day with clickable links to the main sections in the programme (above) and to the full contents slide-by-slide (below).

Andrew Derrington

## Contents

Programme . . . . .	1
Introduction . . . . .	1
Questions to answer before you start . . . . .	2
What a Grant Application has to Achieve . . . . .	3
A good case for support is designed for the decision process . . . . .	3
Funders' questions . . . . .	3
Answers to Funders' Questions . . . . .	4
Which question do you start with? . . . . .	4
That's how you write a zombie grant... . . . . .	5
Always start with the competence question . . . . .	5
The Decision . . . . .	6
The Decision: what information do they have? . . . . .	6
The Decision: what is the process? . . . . .	6
Implications of the decision process? . . . . .	7
Case for Support as Sales Pitch . . . . .	7
The Magic Formula . . . . .	8
10 Key statements . . . . .	8
Use Layout to Communicate with Skimmers and Speed-Readers . . . . .	9
Teach Terminology with Tag Phrases . . . . .	9
Re-cycle Text From Case for Support . . . . .	10
Key Statements . . . . .	10
Resources . . . . .	10
The Recipe . . . . .	11
Sentences 7, 8 & 9 and 3, 4 & 5 . . . . .	11
Sentences 6 & 10 . . . . .	12
Sentence 1 & 2 . . . . .	12
Build the Structure with Key Sentences . . . . .	12
Standard Structure . . . . .	12
Alternative Structure . . . . .	13
Subprojects . . . . .	13
Aims & Objectives . . . . .	14
Strategy . . . . .	14
Should I use a successful application as an example to copy? . . . . .	15
Writing Guidelines . . . . .	15
Nominalisations . . . . .	16

### Questions to answer before you start

- How many aims or research questions do you have? (The correct answer is 3). For each aim or question:-
  - State the aim or question
  - Describe how the research will answer this question or meet this aim.
  - Say what makes it important to answer this question or meet this aim in the context of your project.1.  
State the overall aim of your project in terms intelligible to someone outside your research field.
- Name the funder and research scheme you are targeting.
- What makes the research aim important for the target funding scheme.

4. Describe the overall research methods.
5. Impact
  1. Who will benefit most from this research?
  2. How will they benefit?
  3. What will you do to ensure that they benefit?

**If you start writing a grant application without answering these questions, you might never finish.**

## **What a Grant Application has to Achieve**

### **Why you need a magic Formula**

**Andrew Derrington**

[Back to Programme](#)

## **A good case for support is designed for the decision process**

1. [What do funders want to know?](#)
2. [How do funders make decisions](#)
  - [What are the implications?](#)
  - [The Case for Support as Sales Pitch](#)
  - [The Magic Formula](#)

[Back to Programme](#)

## **Funders' questions**

1. IS THE PROJECT IMPORTANT (to Them)?
  - Direct Outcomes (discoveries)
  - Indirect Outcomes (training, career development, mobility...)
2. WILL THE PROJECT BE SUCCESSFUL?
  - Will it produce the direct outcomes?
    - Will they be put to use?
  - Will it produce the indirect outcomes?
3. ARE THE APPLICANTS COMPETENT?
  - Can they do the research?
  - Can their institution support it?
4. WOULD A GRANT BE VALUE for MONEY?
  - Are the resources requested Necessary, Sufficient, and Proportionate

[Back to Programme](#)

## Answers to Funders' Questions

- IMPORTANCE (evidence)
  - Evidence about direct outcomes in literature review
  - Evidence about indirect outcomes in details of project, institutions, & investigators
- SUCCESS (project details)
  - Research activities in relation to outcomes?
  - Impact and dissemination plans..
- COMPETENCE (evidence)
  - Evidence that the team has the necessary skills in publications (quality and authorship).
  - Evidence that PI and institution can deliver the project in track record & facilities.
- VALUE for MONEY (project details)
  - Mention how grant resources will be used in the project.
  - Mention institutional resources needed for the project.

[Back to Programme](#)

## Which question do you start with?

- IMPORTANCE?
  - Pick an important question
    - \* Start the literature review
    - \* .....

[Back to Programme](#)

## That's how you write a zombie grant...



If the description of the research is less than 50% of the case for support it is probably a 'zombie'.

[Back to Programme](#)

### Always start with the competence question

- Design a project that you can deliver
  - Do you have appropriate quality publications
  - Do they demonstrate all relevant Skills?
- Don't make the project much bigger than your past funded projects.
  - Big projects go to those who have too many little projects
  - Think about a cost ladder

- \* £10K/£30K/£100K /£300K/ £1M /£3M/ £10M
- Don't try to jump to the top of the ladder

[Back to Programme](#)

## The Decision

- Who decides?
  - Very busy people
  - Very successful
    - \* Have their own grants
    - \* And research groups
    - \* And jobs
  - Not knowledgeable about your particular research area.
- May have 'user' representation
- Supported by secretariat

## The Decision: what information do they have?

- Applications
  - Usually a set of 50-100 per meeting.
  - Arrive 3-6 weeks before meeting.
  - Everybody delays reading them as long as possible.
- ...
- Expert referees' reports
  - Written reports with evaluation and score.
  - Usually 2-5 per application
  - Usually arrive before the meeting but often after the applications
  - Often conflicting
- ...
- Designated members' reports
  - Oral report by 2 or 3 members who have read the application.
  - Usually lasts < 5 minutes

## The Decision: what is the process?

- Designated members report on the proposal
  - Usually less than 5 minutes
  - Who, what, why, how, outcomes, strengths, weaknesses, summary of referees, how important and exciting, suggested score
  - One person may have to do this for 10 or more grants in a day.

- Probably based on 30-60 minutes preparation.

...

- Discussion by all members of the committee.
  - Even though some of them may be reading it for the first time during the discussion.
    - \* They will probably have read the summary beforehand.

...

- All members in the discussion can influence the score.
  - No matter how little they know.
  - And how little time they have spent reading your proposal.

### Implications of the decision process?

- Referees will analyse your grant in detail but:-
  - Most of the committee won't read it.
  - The ones who do read it won't know the field.
  - There will be about 100 other applications.
  - This imposes requirements on the case for support.

...

- It must be a very good sales pitch
  - Easy to analyse at a deep level (Referee).
  - Know what's in it by skimming it (Committee Member).
  - Learn the subject by reading it (Committee Member).
  - Memorable and Distinctive (Designated Member).

...

- These properties need a magic formula

[Back to Programme](#)

### Case for Support as Sales Pitch

- Introduction
  - Tell them the Outcome & how important it is.
  - Tell them everything that is to come

...

- 
- Background/Literature review
  - Explains how 3 research outcomes are really important.
    - \* You can call these the "AIMS"
    - \* You can also call them "RESEARCH QUESTIONS"
    - \* [And describe them in KS 3-5](#)

...

- 
- Description of Project/Methods/Research Plan
  - Describes the research activities in each of 3 [sub-projects](#) and makes it clear that they will produce the 3 important outcomes.
    - \* You can call these the “OBJECTIVES”
    - \* [And describe them in KS 7-10](#)

...

- 
- Form-Only funders (NIHR)
  - Case for support consists of answers to questions.
  - Make sure Background/Motivation answer maps onto Research Plan answer.

[Back to Programme](#)

## The Magic Formula

- [Key Statements](#)
- [Layout](#)
- [Tag Phrases](#)
- [Repetition](#)

## 10 Key statements

10 statements define a case for support

- KS1 States the overall aim, the specific approach & an example of success with that approach
- KS2 Says what makes the overall aim important
- KS3,4&5 Say that we need the sub-project outcomes (AIMS) & why.
- KS6 Introduces the project
- KS7,8&9 Summarise the research activities in the sub-projects (OBJECTIVES) and their outcomes.
- KS10 Says what will happen when research is done (Impact?)

...

- Use the key statements as the summary.

...

- Re-use the key statements to introduce the case for support

...

- Use a key statement to begin each subsection
- Then follow it with the detail
  - that convinces the referee

[Back to Programme](#)



## Use Layout to Communicate with Skimmers and Speed-Readers

- Message on first line of paragraph (ASSERT then JUSTIFY)
  - First sentence of para ASSERTS (topic sentence)
  - Remainder of para JUSTIFIES
    - \* This is where you cite literature
    - \* This is how you avoid citing too much literature.

...

- White space above each paragraph

...

- Readers' eye movements land on blank lines.
  - Speed-readers will read first line of every paragraph.
  - Browsers will only read first lines.
  - Detail readers will know what to expect in each para

[Back to Programme](#)

## Teach Terminology with Tag Phrases

### KeySentences 3,4 & 5

- 'We need to know' + tag phrase because....
- We need to know the relationship between the performance of single neurons and the performance of the whole visual system in order to establish the likely contribution of single neurons to perception. . . .

### KeySentences 7,8 & 9

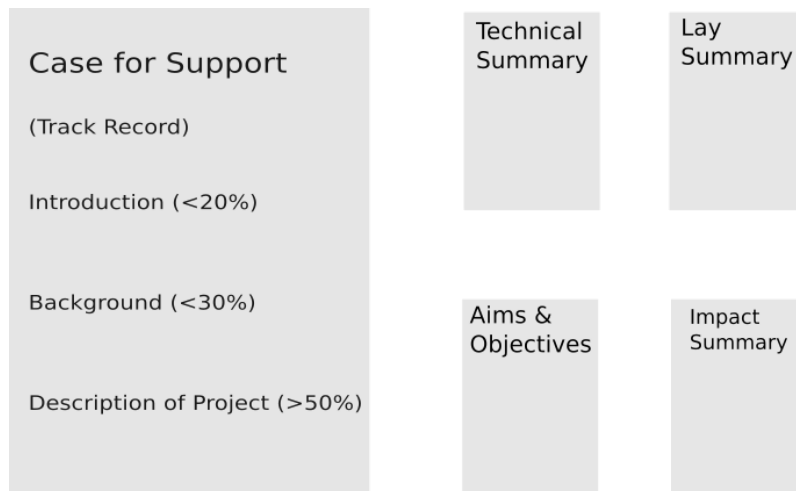
- 'We will do this sub-project in order to discover' + tag phrase
- We will record single neurons during perceptual tasks and calculate sensitivity functions for neural responses and for task performance in order to characterise the relationship between the performance of single neurons and the performance of the whole visual system.

...

- Tag phrases provide meaning - link between aims and objectives
- Use them in headings (make them short enough)

[Back to Programme](#)

## Re-cycle Text From Case for Support



- Repeat key sentences and tag phrases
  - to provide common structure, and
  - to link
- Maintain structure and order

## Key Statements

- Outcome
- Institution's Strengths
- Fellow's Strengths
- Importance of Project
- 3 Research Aims and why we need them "We need to know"
- Project summary
- 3 Research Objectives to deliver Aims "This will tell us"
- Dissemination / Impact
- Developmental Programme (How many parts?)
- Developmental value of Project

...

- Start every section with a key statement that summarises it

...

- They introduce the detail
  - that convinces the referee /detail reader
- Re-use them in the summary

## Resources

What's been funded?

- Research Council Project Summaries
  - <http://gtr.rcuk.ac.uk>

- [ERC Summaries](#)
- [Leverhulme Awards 2016](#)

Advice on writing:- [www.parkerderrington.com/blog](http://www.parkerderrington.com/blog)

- [How to construct a project](#)
- [The key sentences](#)
- [How to get feedback](#)

[Back to Start](#)

## The Recipe

- [Write Answers to the Pre-Start Questions](#)
- [Make Sure you Have a Sales Pitch](#)
- [Prepare your Ingredients](#)
  - [Sales Pitch](#)
  - [Project Intro & Outtro](#)
  - [The Elevator Pitch](#)
- [Build the Structure](#)

## Sentences 7, 8 & 9 and 3, 4 & 5

### The Sales pitch:- “We need to know” & “This will tell us”

- Sentences 7, 8 & 9: “This will tell us” (One per Subproject)
  - Summarise the research activities and state the outcome of a sub-project.
  - “We will do X and this will tell us Y”
  - Structures the Research Plan/Methodology. Introduces a subsection.
  - States an OBJECTIVE (and the aim it will deliver).

▪

...

- Sentences 3, 4 & 5: ‘We need to know’ (One per subproject)
  - Say why we need the outcome of the sub-project.
  - “We need to know Y because Z”
  - Structures the Background: Introduces a subsection
  - States an AIM
  - Can be paraphrased as a Research Question

▪

...

- Rookie mistakes
  - Failing to mention research activities in 7, 8 & 9

- Describing the research activities instead of outcomes in 3, 4 & 5
- [Back to Programme](#)

## Sentences 6 & 10

### Sentence 6 (Project Intro)

- Sentence 6 introduces the introductory part of the description of the project.
  - Summarise the distinctive aspects of the project in fewer than 40 words.

### Sentence 10 (Project Outro)

- Sentence 10 introduces your discussion of what will happen after the research is complete
- It will depend to a certain extent on whether the importance is academic or practical or both.
  - State in about 40 words what you will do to maximise the benefit from the project.

## Sentence 1 & 2

### The Elevator Pitch

1. Sentence 1 should have 3 parts:-
  1. What the project will achieve, in terms meaningful to the whole committee.
  2. The general research approach, to suggest you will be successful.
  3. An example of your achievements using that approach, to show you are competent.

...
2. Sentence 2 says what it is that makes the outcome important. For example...
  1. Quantify the real-world problem it will help to solve.
  2. Say what it will allow us to do that we can't do now.
  3. Prepare to say which named priorities of your funder it contributes to, and how?

## Build the Structure with Key Sentences

Standard Structure: [Key sentences as Introduction and Skeleton](#)

[Alternative Structure for BBSRC](#)

[EPSRC Structure](#)

## Standard Structure

### Key Sentences form the Intro and the Skeleton

1. Introduction - Key Sentences 1-10

2. Background - 5 subsections - sells the project outcomes.
  - KS1 State the overall outcome (GENERAL AIM). Then add the detail
  - KS2 Say what makes the outcome important. Then justify in detail.
  - KS3,4,5 Say why we need each research outcome (AIMS) & add detail after each
3. Methods. Describes the Project
  - KS6 Summarise the project. Then add detail.
  - KS7,8,9 Summarise each sub-project (OBJECTIVE) & the AIM it achieves. Add detail after each.
  - KS10 Say what happens after the project (impact?). Then add detail.

## Alternative Structure

### Aim and Objectives introduce the Programme (BBSRC)

1. Introduction to Background - Key Sentences 1-5
2. Background - 5 subsections - sells the project outcomes.
  - KS1 State the overall outcome (GENERAL AIM). Then add the detail
  - KS2 Say what makes the outcome important. Then justify in detail.
  - KS3,4,5 Say why we need each research outcome (AIMS) & add detail after each
3. Programme and Methodology Describes the Project.
  - BBSRC requires AIM & OBJECTIVES. Use KS1 & 6-10; then introduce project.
  - KS7,8,9 Summarise each sub-project (OBJECTIVE) & the AIM it achieves. Add detail after each.
  - KS10 Say what happens after the project (impact?). Then add detail.

## Subprojects

### What is a sub-project?

- You break your project into components (subprojects) to make it easier to explain.
  - The sub-projects can be sequential
  - Or parallel
  - Or even different analyses of the same data
  - The only requirement is they produce different, important outcomes.

...

- Each sub-project should produce an important outcome
  - That way the explainer will give a sales pitch.
  - If they know what makes the outcome important.

...

- The perfect number of sub-projects is 3, but 4 is OK.

...

- Don't create dependencies on uncertain outcomes (hostages)

[Back to Programme](#)

## Aims & Objectives

...

- Nobody is sure what Aims & Objectives mean, so you can hijack them to reiterate the sales pitch.

...

- Background/Literature review
  - Explains how 3 research outcomes are really important.
  - Make achieving the outcomes the AIMS
- Description of Project/Methods/Research Plan
  - Describes the research activities in each of 3 [sub-projects](#) and makes it clear that they will produce the 3 important outcomes.
  - Make the subprojects the OBJECTIVES.

...

- The AIMS and OBJECTIVES deliver the sales pitch.
  - [Use Tag Phrases so Aims match Objectives](#)
  - Order them so they match the structure and the wording of the case for support.
  - Always try and give both, even if you are only asked for one.

## Strategy

### Your strategy must accommodate the likelihood of rejection

- Most well-written grant applications get rejected.
- Rejection can be a devastating experience

...

- If you need a grant, you should plan to write 5 or 6 based on the same set of ideas
- Never get down to your last rejection.

...

- If you get 6 rejections, it's time to develop a new set of ideas.

...

- You need to be able to multiplex grant applications
  - Different Outcomes?
  - Different Datasets?
  - Different Objectives, Same Aims?
- You need to be able to write well and quickly.

[Back to Programme](#)

### Should I use a successful application as an example to copy?

- About 75% of funded applications are very badly written
- Apply the following test

. . .

- Can you find single-sentence answers to the following questions in 10 minutes:-
  1. What is the overall aim of the project?
  2. What makes the aim important?
  3. What are the overall research methods?
  4. For each aim or research question (there should be 3 or 4):-
    1. What is the aim or question?
    2. How will the research will answer this question or meet this aim.
    3. What makes it important to answer this question or meet this aim in the context of your project.
- If you can't, it's a bad example to follow.

[Back to Programme](#)

### Writing Guidelines

- Should repetitions use the same words or different words?

. . .

- Same words: NO SYNONYMS

. . .

- [Key statement](#) at the start of every section
- Re-use tag phrases across key statements
- Re-use [tag phrases](#) in headlines

. . .

- Punchline at top of para (~6 paras per page)

. . .

- Strong Verbs (no adverbs, no [nominalisations](#))
- Short sentences
  - [Health Check](#)

. . .

- Avoid value claims (state evidence instead)
- Bullet lists good, lists in sentences bad.

. . .

- No initialisations
  - unless the expansion is in the same paragraph

- or no expansion is needed

[Back to Programme](#)

## Nominalisations

- A nominalisation is a noun phrase constructed from a verb,

. . .

- which can be used with a general purpose verb to create a flabby, pompous, long-winded way of saying something simple.

. . .

- We will investigate X
  - We will carry out an investigation into X
- We will analyse
  - We will undertake an analysis of



## Presenter



Andrew Derrington has in-depth experience of the research funding process. He obtained his first research grant, a Beit Memorial Fellowship for Medical Research, while he was writing his PhD. His research was continuously funded by fellowships, project and programme grants for the next 30 years. He served on research grant committees for The Science and Engineering Research Council, the Medical Research Council and the Wellcome Trust. His book, *The Research Funding Toolkit*, which he co-wrote with Jacqueline Aldridge, research and enterprise associate in the School of Psychology at the University of Kent, is the definitive guide to grant writing for early career academics and research professionals. It is based on Andrew's analysis of how grants committees make funding decisions.

Andrew has worked in eight Universities including two in the world top ten.

He has also worked as a journalist. Over several years he wrote two successful columns in the Financial Times. *The Nature of Things* covered science - from astrophysics to zoology. *Psych Yourself Up* was a guide to the different psychotherapies available in the UK.

Andrew set up [Parker Derrington Ltd](#) in 2013. He now works as a consultant, writing research grant applications and providing strategic advice and training to individuals and organizations.

## Testimonials

*I had a fantastically useful time attending your recent workshop at Leicester University. Writing the 10 key sentences was a very useful exercise and I have, since, worked on them to discover they are a fab tool for any kind of writing really.*

Dr Ranjana Das, University of Leicester

*Andrew blends easy authority and extensive experience with humour and approachability. The result is a workshop full of practical, memorable advice on how to compete more successfully for research funding.*

Professor Peter Clegg, Institute of Ageing and Chronic Disease, University of Liverpool

*I attended one of Andrew's workshops when I was a senior lecturer. The hands on advice about how to structure my applications in a really appealing fashion enabled me to win a grant of nearly £600K the next year. I still implement the advice that I received in that workshop, and pass it down to junior colleagues. I find that Andrew's advice has a high success rate!*

Prof Theresa Gannon, University of Kent

*I still use the tips you gave me for my successful Wellcome SRF application. Your advice on "12 key sentences" is spot-on and helps people focus on the aspects of the proposal that are critical to success instead of getting bogged down in reams of text.*

Prof Mark Baxter, Mount Sinai School of Medicine

*Andrew's grant-writing workshops teach you how to convince the world that it needs your research. They are the most useful training events I have ever attended. His advice about how to sell the big idea without compromising on the science was critical to the success of our £9.3 million ESRC application.*

Prof Julian Pine, University of Liverpool