

Written by Fautin, a professor in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and curator of the Natural History Museum at the University of Kansas

Writing Successful Science Proposals exemplifies what its authors advocate: lively, straight-forward writing free of structural and typographical errors. Deceptively easy to read, my eyelids drooped only when I read some of the sample proposals!-the book is a veritable recipe for success. Its roots are obviously in the writing class the authors teach, as

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is prescriptive and designed as a textbook. Chapters about the different sections of a proposal conclude with exercises for writing that section. But the book is also intended for those in the throes of proposal-writing: the authors advocate reading through the book first, then consulting the chapter relevant to the aspect of the proposal being written as composition proceeds. I was pleased to see the chapter "Ethics and Research," a subject that is sometimes considered to go without saying but, as events continue to remind us, bears frequent emphasis. The chapter's placement at the end of the book, however, belies its importance. I consider as serious the omission of reference to the useful booklet "On Being a Scientist: Responsible Conduct in Research" that I use in my own course on scientific writing. Published by the National Academy Press, it is inexpensive and can be downloaded from nap.edu link.

The penultimate chapter, "Rethink, Revise, and Resubmit," omits mention of what I consider one of the most valuable sources of feedback and advice: the program officer or other agency representative (who the authors advise consulting at the outset of proposal-writing). Not only is ongoing discussion with such a person a learning experience that commonly pays off when the revised proposal is considered, but it helps in understanding the structure and staffing of funding agencies.

I found only one instance of what I consider the authors' failing to heed their own advice. They rightly advocate using current literature yet, in both "References" and "Additional Reading," they cite the third edition of Robert A. Day's *How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper*, even though a fifth edition was published in 1998, the date borne by some of the other literature cited. (As an aside, perhaps because I am a systematist, I have a quarrel with the statement on page 134 that "most cited papers will be less than ten years old." In my opinion, ignorance of the older literature is a pernicious and growing problem, leading both to wasted effort in "discovery" of what is already known, and failure to understand the context of truly novel discoveries.)

There are many books on scientific writing, and a look at my bookshelf suggests I own most of them! They continue to be written, though, because they divide up the subject matter in different ways (writing dissertations, writing papers, making presentations, etc.) and because we differ in how we receive suggestions. Despite its title, I found this book full of wonderful advice for writing all types of documents, not just proposals. Among the many pointers that may be especially helpful to students are: "efficient organization makes a scientifically convincing project even stronger," "avoid alienating the reviewers by permitting typographical errors, erroneous references, or incorrect or inconsistent numbers to creep into the text," and "using headings and subheadings highlights the importance of objectives and hypotheses." It also offers words to live by, such as: "the trick is to keep from getting bogged down in detail" and "some people work on their ideas for months or years before they actually begin to write." If these phrases resonate with you, you will probably enjoy reading and using *Writing Successful Science Proposals*.

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