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. Like all other types of proposals, primary audience members and secondary audience members will read different parts of the proposal.

This important document has two purposes:

- To persuade the reader that your service or product is valuable
  a) Compare your service or product with what the company you are seeking is using
  b) Compare the strengths, costs, and quality
- To persuade the reader that your firm is the one for the job
  a) Prove your company is qualified
  b) Stress the advantages that your company has over the competition

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:

- Provides a detailed consideration of the specific benefits that the client will receive from the product or service
- Focuses 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)

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 a general organizational flow such as the following:

1. Introduce the reasons for the proposal.
   - State the purpose of the document
   - 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

2. In body paragraphs, describe the details of your plan for solving the problem or addressing the opportunity.
   - Present the specific service or product that you are offering
   - 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
   - Mention the materials that you plan to use and provide a breakdown of major costs.

3. End by emphasizing benefits of your product or service, seeking to distinguish it from any offers that may have been submitted by competitors.
   - You may express appreciation for the opportunity to present the proposal
• 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.

Longer Sales Proposals (Refer to the resource titled Proposal)

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.

Because specific sections of the proposal will be read by different members, depending upon their expertise, it is important that you use headings and subheadings so that the organization is clear. Generally, a long-form sales proposal may follow a pattern similar to the one sketched out below:

• Front matter – an opening section that may include the following:
  a) Cover Letter
  b) Title Page provides specific information
  c) Table of contents
  d) List of figures
  e) Executive summary provides a brief summary of the main points to come. It is written for decision-makers, so you should use every effort to write a clear and concise document that will persuade the reader that the proposal is worthy to be considered

Note: the executive summary can be a part of the front matter or part of the body.

• Body—contains a description of the proposed project, a detailed cause and effect, an implementation plan and schedule, budget, and proof that you are qualified.
  a) Introduction – general description describes the purpose of the proposal: to solve a problem or address an opportunity for the client
    1. Describes the monetary information
    2. The product or service (this information probably exists in your company’s publications)
    3. Provides the background
  b) Body section 1: the current problem or opportunity. From this section forward, you will provide your audience with the detailed solutions and the detailed rationale. Your audience will be familiar with technical language; in fact, technical language is expected.
    1. Describes the problem or opportunity
    2. Provides relevant background of the problem or opportunity
    3. Demonstrates a thorough understanding of the situation
    4. Details the causes and effects of the problem
    5. Establishes your own thorough knowledge of the situation at hand
    6. Explains the benefits for the customer
  c) Body section 2: the plan for addressing the problem or opportunity
    1. Lays out the scope of your proposal, describing what you intend to do
    2. Identifies and describes the steps of the plan and the ultimate solution that you intend to deliver
    3. Provides cost analysis—which will include the initial cost and the projected long term savings. It may be a good strategy to break down major cost components. Present the
cost as part of a cost-benefit analysis that also considers the cost 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.

4. Identifies and describes the steps of the plan and the ultimate solution that you intend to deliver.

5. Lists site modifications.

6. Provides a training schedule for staff development and costs to the customer. You must be clear on what you are going to provide and when.

7. Provides a statement to the customer of what you are providing, when, and how much and what the customer is expected to provide. Be explicit and clear to avoid misunderstanding.

d) Body section 3: Qualifications

1. 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.

2. Includes short profiles of key members of the project team, to highlight the particular expertise that they bring to the project.

e) Body section 4: Budget

1. Estimates the cost of the project. It may be good strategy to break down major cost components.

2. Presents the cost as part of a cost-benefit analysis that also considers the cost 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.

f) Statement of Responsibility—prevents misunderstandings

1. Explains the purpose of the statement.

2. Explains and describes your company’s responsibilities.

3. Explains and describes the customer’s responsibilities.

g) Description of the Vendor—provides the customer with information about your company

1. Vendor’s history and core values and philosophies.

2. Experience and reputation.

3. Commitment to the industry.

4. Any research and development.

5. Leading point of sale for vendor.

h) Conclusion – Tie it all together

1. Summarizes your company’s product, service, or system’s advantages.

2. Asks for approval to proceed with the project.

3. Expresses gratitude.

4. Includes contact information so readers can reach you with any questions.

i) Back matter – a closing section, or appendix, that may include a variety of information too detailed to fit within the body of the paper.

1. A detailed schedule of work, showing what tasks will be accomplished in what time frame, may be appropriate for an appendix.

2. Certain charts may also be appropriate.

3. References you have used in compiling information for the proposal.

4. A glossary for technical terms.