Statement of Purpose
Writing Workshop

Sweetland Workshop at the International Institute

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Discussion Topics for Today’s Workshop

- What are you being asked for?
- Know your audience
- Preparing to write
- Write an argument
- Why proposals are rejected
- Additional tips
- Questions
Writing for yourself.

On the one hand you’re writing for yourself:

• To secure funds to travel
• To conduct archival research
• To pursue language training
• To clarify the scope and stakes of your project
Know Your Audience.

The committee needs to believe that:

• They understand your project.
• This an appropriate source of funding for your project.
• That your broader goals are in line with theirs.
• That the funding will result in credible and responsible scholarship.
• That you are trustworthy, resilient, resourceful.
• That you are capable of doing what you’ll say you’ll do – even in an unpredictable context.
Know Your Audience

They need to believe that:
• They understand your project.

How you can help them believe:
• Avoid jargon.
• Do not assume you audience has read the relevant literature; everyone appreciates a graceful reminder.
• Succinctly describe your project’s contribution to your field. (More on this later.)
• Explicitly state the stakes of your project.
Know Your Audience

They need to believe that:

• The grant will be good for YOU: this organization/archive/program an appropriate source of funding for your project.

How you can help them believe:

• Be specific: research and name specific collections and archives, interview subjects, local contacts, language schools and courses, etc.

• State how and when you’ll need the resources that you are applying to use.
Know Your Audience

They need to believe that:

• The grant will be good for THEM: That your broader goals are in line with theirs.

How you can help them believe:

• Put your project in their terms (read announcements, postings, mission statements, etc.).
• Use their keywords.
Know Your Audience

They need to believe that:
• That your research plan is feasible

How you can help them believe:
• Demonstrate your familiarity with specific local institutions.
• Be candid about challenges and how you’ll respond.
• Be realistic about what you can actually accomplish.
Know Your Audience

They need to believe that:
• That the funding will result in credible and responsible scholarship and/or a continuing engagement with the language and project.

How you can help them believe:
• Explicitly link the work you propose to do with your project and its larger stakes.
• Describe your research and writing schedule, and project realistic outcomes.
• Name the end result of your work: a journal article, a conference presentation, diss chapters 3 and 4, continuing language study.
Know Your Audience

They need to believe that:
• That you are trustworthy, resilient, resourceful.
• That you are capable of doing what you’ll say you’ll do – even in an unpredictable context.

How you can help them believe:
• Candidly assess the questions you still have and the challenges you’ll face.
• Describe a range of possibilities for how you’ll use your time.
• Make reference to previous experience abroad, in archives, adjusting to new situations, etc.
Preparing to Write

• Begin early
• Enlist faculty support
• Be sure this is the correct source of funding
• Find out as much as you can about the program
• Speak with past grant recipients
• Familiarize yourself with the program or institution you’re applying to visit.
• Make contacts at your research site/language school.
Preparing to Write (cont.)

• Survey all relevant literature, including the web sites, mission statements, etc.

• View samples of successful statements
  – Ask friends in the department
  – Ask advisers
  – View examples in *Scholarly Pursuits* (online)

• Pre-write to connect the value of your project to the funding source
Constructing an Argument

Like all good arguments, have a thesis, even if it takes the form:

“This project is well suited to this grant because....”
Don’t be afraid to be explicit.

- My scholarship speaks to the research center’s focus on X.
- My scholarship addresses your need for X.
- I am applying for X grant in order to do Y.
- The field of inquiry in which I situate my work is X.
- The main problem my work addresses is X.
- The main question my work asks is X.
- My work makes a new intervention in Y field because it demonstrates Z.
Three Paradigms for Describing Your Project’s Contribution to the Field


Paradigm One

1) This project is a research topic that has never been pursued before.

Challenge: Show that the topic is significant
Three Paradigms for Describing Your Project’s Contribution to the Field


**Paradigm Two**

2) This project examines well-known material, but it offers a new assessment or application.

**Challenge:** make a case for reassessment without denigrating work that’s come before.
Three Paradigms for Describing Your Project’s Contribution to the Field


**Paradigm Three**

3) A combination of paradigms 1-2: the project contributes by exposing some new material, which in turn calls for reassessment of previous research.
Watch for Empty Words

- Significant, invaluable, appealing to me, interesting, exciting, excited, appealing aspect, challenging, enjoyable, enjoy, I like it, satisfying, satisfaction, rewarding, valuable, fascinating, gratifying, helpful, appreciate, meaningful, useful, helping people, meant a lot to me, feel good, I like to help, stimulating, remarkable people, incredible
Ten Things to Avoid

• Any information that doesn’t support your thesis
• Weak verbs
• Mistakes in grammar, spelling, and punctuation
• Colored paper, unusual fonts
• Discussions of personal problems (some exceptions)
• Weak excuses for low test scores or GPA
• Clichés like “I want to help people” and “I want to make the world a better place”
• Other types of generality; details of specific accomplishments speak for themselves
• Arrogance
• Fabrications of any kind
Resources

• Sweetland Center for Writing
  – Writing Workshop
  – 9-5 every day except Wednesday (when the center is closed from 12:30-2pm)
  – Make an appointment online: www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/