

# Modality Approach to Successful Grant Writing

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Successful grant writers: assess what a proposed project has to offer, understand what a grant-making agency wants, and communicate a clear match between the two. The issue is how to develop an understanding of what grant-making agencies want and effectively communicate with target audiences.

**Method:** Applying modality analysis, based on pedagogical theories focused on learning styles, to publications from a funding source involves identifying words that are associated with visual, auditory, or kinesthetic orientations. Matching the identified communication style/modality of the funding source can enhance communication and funding success.

**Results:** Experience with grant proposals that use rhetorical approaches that are based on modality analysis of agency publications can attain more success than other submissions.

**Conclusion:** A grant writer can base his/her selection of rhetorical approaches on modality analysis, which seems to be a viable way to make one's grant proposal text connect with the values, priorities, and communication preferences of a funding source, and this connection enhances chances for success.

**Keywords:** grant writing, rhetoric, modalities, learning styles

## Practitioner's Takeaway

- The best standard advice on grant proposal content is effective: provide clear information on needs, goals, objectives, and evaluation plans.
- Storytelling, as opposed to a dry presentation of facts, increases interest among readers and can be used to catch the attention of grant reviewers.
- Assessing modality preferences of funding sources can help select appropriate rhetorical approaches that will resonate with decision-making readers and enhance persuasive impact and acceptance.
- Appropriate communication styles, selected via modality analysis, might increase the likelihood that proposal reviewers will identify with, come to trust, and thus be persuaded by grant writers.

## Combine Modality-Based Rhetoric with Grant Writing Essentials for Potentially More Effective Results

Good grant writing involves a well-planned message and an appropriate communication strategy that delivers the message persuasively to a target audience.

Recent advances in pedagogy focus on understanding learning styles (modalities) in order to effectively deliver educational lessons tailored to learners. These ideas from pedagogy can be applied to grant writing in order to tailor messages that will effectively and persuasively resonate with funding sources. An understanding of learning modalities can inform a grant writer's rhetorical approach for showing how a project team shares values

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with a funding source; this is especially important in the case of small grant-making foundations where funding decisions are made by personally-involved, dedicated individuals. While these ideas may be less applicable to government agency grants, the analysis process only takes a few minutes and might still assist grant writers in choosing rhetorical approaches and specific wording to apply in the process of writing an effective grant proposal.

Educators typically use instruments designed to diagnose learning styles, preferences, or modalities, and then make an effort to match lessons to the strengths of the students. “Learning styles are a characteristic and preferred way of learning” and they can be thought of as “the conditions under which an individual finds it easiest and most pleasant to learn” (Waubonsee Community College, 2004). To further clarify

A comprehensive definition of learning style was adopted by a national task force, comprised of leading theorists in the field and sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. This group defined “learning styles” as the composite of characteristic cognitive, affective, and physiological factors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how a learner perceives, interacts with, and responds to the learning environment (Keefe, 1979). Included in this comprehensive definition are “cognitive styles,” which are intrinsic information-processing patterns that represent a person’s typical mode of perceiving, thinking, remembering, and problem-solving. (Griggs, 1991)

There are many versions of learning modality theory; however, the ones most prominent in the public mind are those that divide learners into three categories. “*Visual learners* prefer to learn by reading or watching. *Auditory learners* like to learn by listening. *Kinesthetic learners* learn by doing, by touching or manipulating objects, or by using their hands” (Waubonsee Community College, 2004). While much debate among educators continues over these three categories and theories that employ other divisions, for the purposes of understanding grant rhetoric, these three modalities are sufficient based on professional experience with successful grant writing.

While many how-to guides cover the steps involved in planning and explaining a project which needs funding, most do not thoroughly examine the options available for audience analysis that will enable the writing of truly reader-centered proposals. Henson (2004), a grant-writing workshop leader, tries to get grant writers to put themselves “in the role of grant proposal evaluators. What would impress you most if you were responsible for selecting one grant over another?” (p.11). Most people responsible for selecting a grantee make choices based on what seems “best” to them given the needs, values, and mandates of the agency they represent. How to put oneself in the proposal evaluator’s position is not clearly spelled-out by most grant writing specialists, but a modality analysis of the RFP and other agency documents can be a useful way to provide a grant writer with enough insight into the communication preferences and values of the decision makers to adopt a rhetorical approach that can facilitate success.

Generally, grant-writing experts focus on the need to follow RFP (Request for Proposals) directions and to logically persuade the funding agency that this proposal is better than the rest. “Success comes from learning how to produce an excellent proposal, targeted to a specific RFP, and from taking the time required to make a proposal that is better than the other submitted proposals” (Henson, 2004, p.18). In my experience, this advice is partly correct; however, instead of targeting only a RFP, more successful grant writers will target the writers of the RFP who are likely to be among the readers of one’s proposal (especially in the case of small foundations directed by a committed staff). Conducting an analysis of the audience via the RFP and other materials from the funding source in order to understand the motives, values, attitudes, and communication preferences of the grant-making agency personnel can reveal the style of writing needed to enable a writer to connect with the people who are at the center of a funding source.

Many small agency and foundation grants, as well as government grants, are fruitfully realized via the creation of trust and rapport rather than by winning a competition based on facts alone. My own experience with writing a proposal for a client seeking a 1997 US Department of Education grant provided me with ample evidence that using rhetoric that is designed to make

the audience feel comfortable with the grant seeker is a worthwhile strategy. Many non-profit foundations actually state that they promote projects which address their published values and goals. I became increasingly aware of the need for connecting with the audience of a proposal during my work with a Samaritan Center that was seeking funding from the Hogg Foundation in 1999. Analyzing and emulating the communication preferences of a grant proposal audience is as much a key factor in success as is presenting a clear message that answers all the questions of the funding source; of course, the style will not have the desired impact if the content is completely void of substance, so a review of the essential content is prudent.

### Step 1: Be Clear on the Grant Proposal Message

In any grant-writing endeavor, the first task is to fully develop the message; then, audience analysis can aid in choosing writing styles that present the message convincingly. Every good proposal must have a purpose; a proposed project aims to fill a real need or solve a real problem by making a change in a methodical way and documenting that the result of the change met the need. Clearly explaining this message is the first challenge that a grant writer faces, and this is one of the essential skills of grant writers.

#### Distinguish Needs from Solutions that Meet the Needs

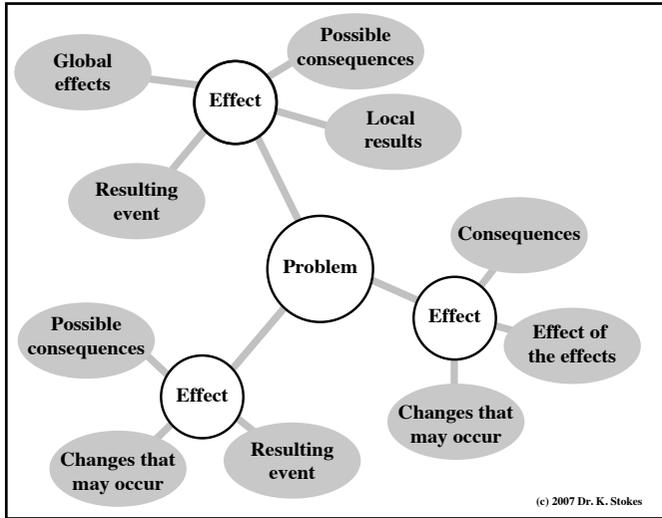
Often, grant writers make the mistake of confusing the “need” with what they want to have. One of the major tasks of writing a grant proposal involves describing a problem that needs to be solved or goal that needs to be achieved and then explaining the steps (objectives) that will be taken to attain the goal. In writing a *needs statement*, it is imperative to be specific in showing the difference between what the beneficiaries of the project currently have and what they need. To do this, grant writers must clearly separate the need from the solution in their own minds. For example, school social workers might need a van to transport children to and from after-school tutoring activities. It is obvious to the school social workers how helpful the van will be. By focusing on the van, however, they are focusing on one part of

a solution and not on the needs that the van will meet. The message would be clearer if they document the learning needs of the students who will be transported in the van and how the van will help improve learning (Chavkin, 1997). Grant writers should be clear about needs and solutions.

Most grant-writing experts recommend logical, factual descriptions of needs, including a brief review of what relevant experts have said, to verify the existence of the need(s) and either to document an ongoing history of a problem or to show how a recent change in some circumstance is the cause of the problem. “By simply reviewing the literature and reporting the research conducted by others, grant-proposal writers can build convincing support for their grants” (Henson, 2004, p.68). Some experts believe that proposals need to include pilot study data and/or explanations of logical decision-making processes that were used to determine that the need really exists or that a specific solution is feasible (Friedenberg *et al.*, 1995, p.64). A viable proposal, then, demonstrates a need for specific knowledge in a discipline or for changes in physical circumstances among a specific population or within a specified physical location. To avoid confusing the need with the solution which will meet the need, it is a good practice to brainstorm all aspects of the problem and the solution in order to ensure that the message is clear to the writer before he/she attempts to explain it to a funding source. Explaining the need, and the reasons why it must be met, is the first step in explaining the central message in a grant proposal.

A statement of need must consider two aspects of the problem to be solved. The first is a matter of how serious the problem is (how desperately it needs to be solved). The seriousness of a problem can be established by looking at the consequences (effects) of the problem. To mentally explore a problem, one might begin with a logical mind map (sometimes called a cluster map) as shown in Figure 1. The effects are typically the perceived problems, but the cause is the real underlying problem that produces the effects (Johnson-Sheehan, 2002). Showing the connections between the real problem and its deleterious consequences can help to prove that a problem deserves to be solved.

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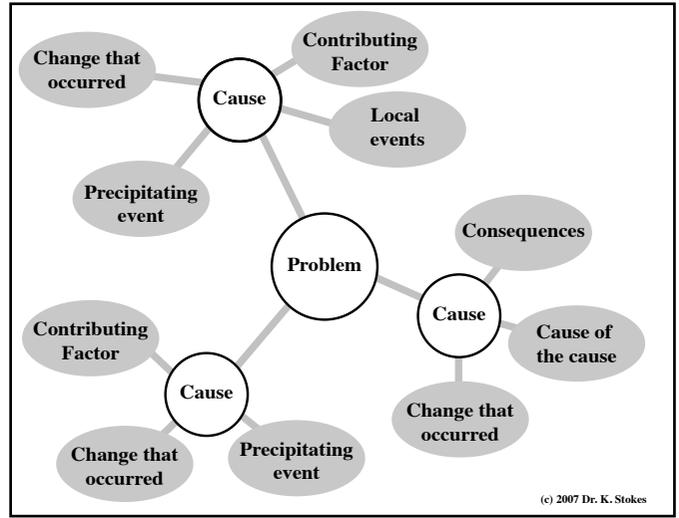


**Figure 1. Logical Mind Mapping Exercise Shows the Existence (and Severity) of a Problem**

The second requirement for creating a statement of need involves a grant writer demonstrating that he/she understands the cause(s) of the problem. Figure 2 shows a logical mind map for exploring causes. Causes can be determined by asking “why” and “what” over and over until one arrives at a starting point. One should keep asking these questions (Why is this happening? What changed to bring about the undesirable effects?) until the ultimate cause that is to blame for the problem is uncovered (Johnson-Sheehan, 2002). A viable solution must target whatever caused the current need. The solution is the basis for the objectives in a proposal, and the goal of the proposed project is to change the effects by altering the causes. Differentiating causes from effects of a problem allows one to articulate a valid goal that will make an appropriate change.

### Explain Goals Clearly as Making a Specific Change

Once the effects have been examined in order to demonstrate the severity of the problem, and the causes have been accurately identified, then the next task is to show how the proposed project will solve the problem in a reliable way. The purpose of a goal statement is to hypothesize about *how much* of *what kind* of change will occur in a *target area/population* within a *specified time* for a set amount of *money*. A need is typically a problem to be solved, the goal is the outcome desired (solution), and the objectives are the activities that will bring about



**Figure 2. Logical Mind Mapping Exercise Determines the Real Problem and Finds its Causes**

the desired outcome or solve the problem. The purpose of objectives statements is to specify how the change will be made to happen (that is, what concrete actions will be taken). Objectives are typically not as difficult as needs statements or evaluation plans.

Once the grant writer has defined the goal and explained the methods of a project, the project goal must be matched with the goals that a funding source is willing to fund and submitted only to agencies concerned with the kind of problems and solutions that the proposed project is pursuing. The “shotgun” method of submitting grant proposals typically “results in high rates of rejection and negative positioning with funding sources” (Henson, 2004, p.4). Sending proposals to numerous foundations and government agencies that seem to have interests only marginally related to the goals of a proposed project not only garners rejection of the proposal, it also reduces the credibility of the project team, their organization, and the grant writer. If an organization’s rejection rate rises to more than 50%, then the name of that organization on a proposal will begin to elicit immediate negative responses from reviewers at grant-making agencies (Bauer, 1999). Showing that good research goes into the selection of potential funding sources, as well as the development of the project, enhances credibility. Finally, every funding source will want some kind of assurance that its money is well-spent and that the proposed goal is achieved; a

valid evaluation plan for demonstrating the achievement of success provides accountability concerning the agency's return on investment.

### **Make Evaluation a Part of the Plan**

Typically, funding sources require evaluation methods (measures of success) to be explicitly described in a grant proposal. The purpose of outcomes assessments or project evaluations "is to reassure the clients that your work met the goals listed in the proposal" (Johnson-Sheehan, 2002, p.81). Grant-making agencies want to know that the project team actually completed the work for which they received funding and accomplished the goal that their proposal promised to deliver. It is not enough to state that the problem will be eliminated or that the unacceptable effects of the problem will be reduced. The question is: how will the degree of success be measured? Grant-making agencies expect grant writers to define success as attaining some degree of achievement with respect to the planned goal. A Technology Innovation Challenge Grant Program RFP expresses the need for an evaluation plan as follows:

But Challenge Grant successes and lessons must be well documented. A carefully developed evaluation plan should be part of each application. It is not enough to promise that an evaluation will be done at some point in the future. A specific section of the application should explicitly describe the evaluation design that will be in place when the grant begins. The plan should establish clear benchmarks to monitor progress toward specific goals, and it should be explicit about how improvements in learning and instruction will be assessed. Developing evidence of effectiveness should not be put off until the last stages of the effort. In a Technology Innovation Challenge Grant, a strong evaluation plan must be a consideration from the design stage onward and information generated by the evaluation should provide continuous feedback for improvement to the project and to wider education community. (U. S. Department of Education, 1997, p.6)

Fortunately, it is not difficult to develop an evaluation plan based on a specific goal. All the grant writer has to do is specify how the information about circumstances "before" and "after" the project is

implemented will be collected and compared as well as how much of a difference will be counted as success. If that specified difference is attained, then success is achieved.

In addition to an overall evaluation, intermediate success should also be measured throughout the project implementation, and the plan for doing so should be outlined in the proposal as well. Project evaluation should not fall into the "autopsy" category. Many project coordinators wait until a project is completed before they consider doing an evaluation, when it is often too late to change some of the activities/methods that could have improved the project. Staff should consider combining a process (formative) evaluation with an outcome (summative) evaluation (Chavkin, 1997). Planning for and completing periodic formative evaluations will allow a project manager to stay on track, and having a plan for such periodic evaluations detailed in a proposal will reassure a funding source that the proposed project will be conducted effectively and competently.

After costs, the things that grant-making agencies most want to know are: what need will be filled (what problem will be solved), how will the goal be achieved (who will do what specific activities to bring about the solution), and how will success be measured (who will measure what, when will measurements be taken, and how will comparisons be made)? Content is key, but failure to communicate a good plan can still result in a lack of funding. Effectively communicating a project's needs, goal(s), objectives, and evaluation strategies to a funding source requires making the right rhetorical and stylistic choices for the audience.

### **Step 2: Develop a Good Story to Present the Facts**

Once the content (needs, goals, objectives, and evaluation plans) has been fully developed and matched with a grant-making agency's values, the next step is to determine how to express the ideas that have been developed. Grant-writing experts recommend numerous strategies from perspicuity to storytelling. Being clear and brief certainly shows respect for the time of the readers. Keeping busy agency personnel interested in reading a proposal to the end is also important. One of

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the greatest concerns is for connecting with the audience because people naturally trust, and thus prefer to give money to, people who seem just like them in terms of values and preferences (that is, people with whom they can identify). Making a connection and maintaining interest begins with respecting the reader's time and effort via good organization, proceeds by maintaining the reader's interest with a compelling story, and culminates with communicating in a manner that makes the reader feel comfortable and identify with the writer.

### Audience Interest in Facts Is Maintained by Stories

Just as carefully targeting submissions to agencies is integral to grant writing, perspicuity is needed as a way to respect the time of grant readers. "Because many evaluators receive an unmanageable number of long, poorly written proposals, brevity and clarity should be the goal when writing each part. Include just enough in each part to do the job, and the job, of course, is to communicate clearly and persuasively" (Henson, 2004, p.31). It is also important to determine if the proposal evaluators will be experts in the field or if the content must be explained in layman's terms. Effective grant proposal writing employs language which is clear and simple to understand, direct and forceful to grab and hold attention, concise so as not to waste time, and positive with avoidance of negatives that slow reading (Henson, 2004). Simple, straightforward language, however, need not be dull. "Powerful and clear sentences can be written by placing a concrete subject at the beginning of the sentence and following it immediately with an action verb written in the present tense" (Henson, 2004, p.86). Expert advice on grant writing recommends creating clear and concise communication with a direct and forceful style to make reading and understanding easier and using action verbs to enliven the presentation of facts. A "forceful style" might repel some readers; modality analysis helps grant writers determine which styles are appropriate for an audience, as noted in Step 3 below.

Keeping the reader interested is a concern. Grant writers are advised to create an interesting narrative about the benefits that will result from a proposed project with an emphasis on sympathetic beneficiaries of the project (for example, at-risk teens, underprivileged children, populations of cute and furry animals, or the environment that our grandchildren will inherit). "One

of the most powerful routes to improving instruction while producing substance for grant proposals is story telling" (Henson, 2004, p.70). For the ancient, Greek philosopher, Aristotle, a story involves setting the scene and identifying a conflict in the beginning, showing how things play out in the middle which culminates in a climax, then resolving the conflict in the end so as to provide the audience with a cathartic release of emotions such as pity and fear (as cited in McKeon, 1947, pp.634-641). In a proposal, the current situation, the persons involved, and the desired outcome can be naturally described via a beginning, a middle with a climax, and an end with a resolution. Every story has an antagonist, a protagonist, a setting, and a conflict as well as a resolution.

Cheryl A. Clarke (2001), an accomplished grant writer, points out that even program officers (people who review grants) love a good story (p.xx). She goes on to say that a "storyteller's goal is to engage, or 'hook,' a reader with the first few sentences or paragraphs of the narrative" (p.37). The first step is to set the scene (constraints of time and place involved in the current situation that must be changed). Then, the narrative should introduce the hero. "It may come as no surprise that the hero in every proposal is the non-profit agency" (Clarke, 2001, p.41) or research institution that is seeking funding. Introducing the hero involves establishing the credibility of the project's team and showing that this team has the ability to accomplish the goal. Other characters in the story include the beneficiaries of the proposed project who might be youth at risk, abandoned elderly, or local citizens afraid of crime (Clarke, 2001). Once the setting and the characters have been made to feel real to the audience, the plot then builds tension as the conflict (problem) is introduced (Clarke, 2001). "Tension continues to mount until the tale reaches its climax" (Clarke, 2001, p.49). The climax is resolved by applying a solution—something done by the hero. The grant-making agency is depicted as enabling the protagonist/hero to perform the actions necessary to save the intended beneficiaries from the horrible antagonist (problematic situation or negative societal force) they face (Clarke, 2001). Quotes from people who have been helped by the grant-seeking agency in the past, or from those who currently face the difficult problem and desperately desire a solution, can help to put a credible voice to the characters in the story

(Clarke, 2001). Qualitative needs can be established on this kind of personal level via surveys of the opinions of afflicted persons, and then the success of the project can be evaluated by similar surveys and quotes from satisfied beneficiaries of the completed project. Scientific research projects, on the other hand, typically require quantitative data to document the “before” and “after” conditions, so putting a personal voice with the information might be more challenging, but it is not impossible. Presenting the proposal narrative as a story, with characters that make the readers want to care about them, is considered one of the best ways to keep a description of a project plan organized and interesting.

### Using Story Boards Helps Organize Facts into Stories

One communication specialist, Cliff Atkinson (2005), even suggests creating a storyboard to organize any information aimed at winning the attention of an audience; he recommends a three-act arrangement (like Aristotle’s plot) involving “setting up all the key elements, including the setting, the main character, a conflict, and the desired outcome” (p.23). Act 1 should answer five questions for the audience: where and when are we, who are we, why are we here, what do we want to happen, and how do we move from the current situation to the solution (Atkinson, 2005). The second act develops the action by appealing to emotion and reason; this segment will “include only information that supports your reasons for recommending the solution and exclude everything else” (Atkinson, 2005, p.53). The rational appeals in act 2 should include three good reasons for accepting the recommended course of action. The final act focuses on the resolution of the conflict by restating the problem, recommending a solution, bringing the action to a climax, and reinforcing the resolution with an emotional appeal (Atkinson, 2005). Herrick (2005) explains how, in Book II, chap 1-11 of *Rhetoric*, Aristotle shows that pathos (appealing to emotions) involves the psychology of emotion and putting the audience in the right frame of mind to accept what a speaker is saying, and the purpose of pathos is to move the audience to action, to prompt them to do what the speaker wishes (pp.83-84). The storyboard strategy for organizing information simplifies complicated concepts so as to hold the interest of an audience. Atkinson (2005) notes that story structure “can help you to focus your ideas, clarify your words and

images, and produce an engaging experience for both you and your audiences” (p.21). A storyboard for a grant proposal might follow the outline depicted in Figure 3 that uses an example of a neighborhood in which crime is drastically rising and residents decide to start a Neighborhood Watch program in response.

### Step 3: Select an Effective Rhetorical Approach

Once the content and arguments are organized, a successful grant writer selects words and phrases that accurately and concisely explain a project in a way which reflects the funding source’s values and beliefs and which uses appropriate communication styles. “Understanding the thinking and values of the granter is critical to being successful; too many grant seekers understand only their own beliefs and thus write from a narrow perspective” (Chavkin, 1997). Success requires writing an interesting account of a project description in a manner that demonstrates shared values between the project team and the funding source.

### Use Rhetoric to Identify with the Audience

Kenneth Burke might view the kind of sharing of values that is needed between a grant writer and his/her audience in terms of identification and consubstantiation. In “A Rhetoric of Motives” (1950), Burke explains an approach to language analysis and use that aims at enhancing one’s understanding of the basis of conflict, the virtues and dangers of cooperation, and the opportunities for identification (perceived as the same) and consubstantiality (being of one substance). Identification involves shared principles, values, and/or interests: “*A* is not identical with his colleague, *B*. But insofar as their interests are joined, *A* is *identified* with *B*” (Burke, 2001, p.1325). Burke takes this idea further. “To identify *A* with *B* is to make *A* ‘consubstantial’ with *B*” (p.1326). Persuasion requires creating identification between a writer and an audience, and such identification can be accomplished by showing commonalities in attitudes and styles of communication as well as in principles and values. As Burke puts it, “...in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them *consubstantial*” (p.1326). When ideas and values are

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communicated in a way that enhances shared imagery and sensations, feelings of being joined can also be enhanced.

Understanding not only the values, but also the communication style preferences of grant reviewers, may help a grant writer to identify with his/her

<b>Act I – setting up the story – where, when, who, why, what, how</b>	
<b>Setting</b>	A working class neighborhood of 82 houses
<b>Protagonist</b>	Our community and your grant-making agency working together
<b>Imbalance faced</b>	Rising crime rates are threatening to ruin the lives of 82 American families with fear / threat of serious losses (property and maybe life)
<b>Balance sought</b>	The original peace can be restored to these families
<b>Solution to pursue</b>	Training a volunteer Neighborhood Watch program can empower residents to reduce crime and eliminate fears that currently grip them
<b>Act II – developing the action with facts and evidence</b>	
<i>Main point 1</i> Neighborhood Watch programs work	Supporting point 1.1 evidence from research
	Supporting point 1.2 evidence from other Neighborhood Watch programs
	Supporting point 1.3 evidence from local police department crime reports
<b>Main point 2</b> The residents of this area are properly motivated	Supporting point 2.1 48 neighbors made commitments to participate
	Supporting point 2.2 elderly and disabled folks agreed to provide coffee
	Supporting point 2.3 parents of small children agreed to provide batteries, etc.
<b>Main point 3</b> Local police are willing to work with volunteers	Supporting point 3.1 police have given a list of needed safety equipment
	Supporting point 3.2 police will train volunteers on two evenings for free
	Supporting point 3.3 All that is needed is \$1,600 to purchase safety equipment
<b>Act III – frame the resolution</b>	
<b>Crisis</b>	[Briefly restate the crisis / problem and its negative effects] Rising crime rates are threatening to ruin the lives of 82 American families with fear / threat of serious losses (property and maybe life)
<b>Solution restated</b>	[Repeat something the audience already knows—the needed solution] Peace can be restored to these families with the right action plan
<b>Climax</b>	[Provide an overall “theme” to bring together all parts of the message] “Neighborhood crime need not be the end of an American community”
<b>Resolution</b>	[Provide a simple, catchy phrase to plant your idea in the minds of the audience and prompt them to view your project favorably] Empowering individuals can revitalize American communities

**Figure 3. A Storyboard Template Can Be used for Organizing a Grant Proposal. Atkinson’s Storyboards Organize Complex Information with Both Logical Facts and Emotional Appeals**

audience. “Grant seekers should know their audience. Key questions to consider are: Who is evaluating the proposal? What kinds of projects does the evaluating group want to fund? What are their interests? It is often beneficial for grant seekers to roleplay what it would be like if they were receiving the request for funding” (Chavkin, 1997). Being able to write in the communication modality of the grant reviewer is one way to play the role of, or identify with, one’s audience. To understand and write from the perspective of the proposal evaluators, a grant writer can study the repeated value-laden words as well as the communication modality preferences evinced in the RFP or other communication from the funding source. Just as people have preferred learning styles that make educational tasks seem easier, people likewise have preferred communication styles with which they feel more comfortable. Emulating another’s communication modality promotes identification.

### **Analyze and Match the Audience’s Communication Modality**

The benefit of matching a grant-making agency’s communication style became especially apparent to me when I was preparing grant proposal materials for a Samaritan Center that received funding from the Hogg Foundation to initiate a project aimed at reducing family violence in a high-abuse area of Houston, Texas. In addition to presenting clear facts and persuasive arguments that addressed this funding source’s goals and values, I wrote the grant proposal in a style that emulated the preferred communication style of the funding source. To determine communication style preferences, as well as the values and goals, of a funding source, one can analyze its mission statement, RFP, history of the agency, or other publications (printed or online). By focusing on identifying values/goals and communication style preferences, a grant writer may understand what the proposal readers need to know and how they prefer to have information communicated; then the writer can adapt his/her own expression of the project’s goals to communication styles preferred by the readers rather than communicating via the writer’s preferred verbal style, which may clash with that of the reader and, thereby, make the reader feel uncomfortable with the writer.

One way to determine the values of a funding source is to analyze the mission statement that may be included in the RFP or which one may find through print publications or on the Internet. Many foundations clearly display their mission statements in their literature as well as their Websites. Government sponsored RFPs often include one or more of the following helpful sections: a description of the agency and its activities and goals, a description of the program through which funding is being offered, and/or a statement of the purpose or reason for issuing the current RFP. For instance, the Division of Education Programs within the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) offers the following program description:

Humanities Initiatives for Faculty are intended to strengthen and enrich humanities education and scholarship at Institutions with High Hispanic Enrollment. These grants may be used to enhance the humanities content of existing programs, develop new programs, or lay the foundation for more extensive endeavors in the future. Each project must be organized around a core topic or set of themes. (NEH, 2007)

The description makes it clear that this division of the NEH places value on organized plans for new or improved humanities programs at Institutions with High Hispanic Enrollment.

While government agencies often provide a rationale for offering funding in their RFPs, foundations and corporations typically express their values in a mission statement. The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health provides a statement of its vision and its mission as well as a list of its values. Analyzing these statements (Figure 4) leads to a clear understanding that the Hogg Foundation is interested primarily in promoting mental health in Texas. Thus, projects designed to take place outside of Texas should not apply for funding from this foundation. Further, it is clear that projects involving delivery of services, conducting of mental health research, development of related policies, and educational outreach programs concerning mental health will be more likely to interest the foundation. “A focus on underserved populations and areas of the state” is also stated as a value, which means that projects which serve the needs of ethnic, gender, disability, and

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economic groups who do not typically receive attention are even more likely to receive funding. The values statement also notes a concern with maintaining the reputation of the foundation, so it would not be likely to fund risky projects but would prefer projects based on proven techniques or sound research. Closely examining a mission statement or program description in a RFP can provide valuable information about the scope of projects that are likely to receive funding from a funding source as well as information about the methods that they would consider acceptable and the beneficiaries that they would prefer to have served.

Knowing what a funding source values allows one to engage in “values-based grantseeking. A common mistake of grantseekers is to write their proposals based

on their own values” (Bauer, 1999, p.6). A proposal should demonstrate where the project team honestly shares values with the funding source, especially in the case of a small foundation with personally-involved, dedicated individuals making funding decisions. Analysis of agency publications for content and style can provide grant writers with valuable insight into values as well as preferred communication modalities.

### Analyze Modalities to Match Communication Styles

In addition to values and goals, communication preferences can be found in mission statements and other publications from foundations, corporations, or government institutes. The more that funding source personnel are able to understand the way proposal messages are communicated, the more likely they are to feel comfortable with the people they perceive to be behind the writing. One can note the sensory modes used in the RFP and other publications and can match one’s own communication style to that of the funding source.

If an agency’s RFP includes mostly visual language, then a grant writer can choose visually-oriented words for the proposal even if the grant writer is normally a more auditory- or kinesthetic-oriented person. Further, visual people tend to be fast-paced and don’t like to waste time, while kinesthetic oriented individuals like to slow down and get to know people personally. Auditory people rely on one’s word as one’s bond, so they may hold a project leader accountable to the letter of the law. One can examine documents that a funding source publishes for clues to the sensory modality preferred. Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic communicators tend to choose words that reflect their sensory preferences and communication styles (as shown in Figure 5). Reflecting the preferred word choice can be a good way to invite a grant reviewer to feel comfortable with a grant seeker.

Much has been made of sensory modality preferences in education; there is no reason why the ideas could not also be applied in grant writing as a method of establishing rapport and making educating an agency’s personnel about the goals of a project easier. Among educators, the idea is to teach students in ways that match their learning strengths which are differentiated via sensory pathways (Sprenger, 2003). “Since all information is received through our five senses, many researchers feel that a preference is

### Vision, mission, and values

#### Vision

We envision a Texas that leads the nation in promoting mental health and recovery from mental illness, supporting all Texans in achieving their potential.

#### Mission

The Hogg Foundation promotes improved mental health for the people of Texas through the support of effective mental health services, research, policies, and education. The Foundation works in partnership with communities, service providers, advocates, policy-makers, researchers and educators.

#### Values

We value:

- Cultural relevance in all aspects of the Foundation’s work and philanthropy.
- A focus on underserved populations and areas of the state.
- Evaluating the impact of our grants as well as our own performance as an organization.
- Our role as leaders within the philanthropic community to increase resources for mental health.

(Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, 2006)

**Figure 4. Example of a Foundation’s Mission Statement that Shows Its Values**

**Visual people say:** We want to *see* projects with a *clear vision* of the big *picture*. Perspectives should be *clearly* outlined, and *shortsighted views* must be avoided. [Words tend to be visual (vision, clear, view) and speech tends to be rapid.]

**Auditory people say:** We request *clear* proposals which *harmonize* with our agency's goals. Questions should be *answered* completely, and all steps should be *amplified precisely*. Proposals should be *in tune with* stated needs. [Words tend to be hearing/verbal oriented (harmonize, hear, words, clear) and speech tends to be verbose and well paced.]

**Kinesthetic people say:** The agency will consider proposals which are *concrete*, able to *demonstrate a firm grasp* of the problem, and *move toward* making a definite *impact*. Ideas must be *solid*; explanations must be *sharp*. [Words tend to be touch/movement oriented (feel, concrete, sense, firm, lively, handle) and speech tends to be slow.]

**Figure 5. Examples of Speaking Styles for Different Sensory Modalities**

developed for a specific sense (Dunn & Dunn, 1987; Grinder, 1991; Markova, 1992; Sprenger, 2002). Just as most of us develop a preference for using one hand or the other, and that one becomes 'dominant,' many people likewise appear to have dominant sensory pathways" (Sprenger, 2003, p.33). For some people, the one sensory modality becomes so dominant that they must "translate" everything into that modality in order to understand, remember, and recall the information (Sprenger, 2003). Since people tend to understand and remember better the information that comes to them via their preferred sensory pathways, it makes sense that reflecting the sensory modality of a grant reviewer in the writing style of a proposal would allow the proposal to seem more clearly comprehensible and more memorable.

Figures 6 and 7 provide an example that may illustrate the application of sensory modality theory to audience analysis. The example for analysis (Figure 6) comes from online materials about the history of the Hogg Foundation. The results of an analysis (Figure 7) of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic words, as well

as value-laden words, can be seen in this document. The analysis shows that the dominant sensory modality is kinesthetic and values include: education, communication, research, reputation, minorities, culture, employment, and mental health. Thus, the Samaritan Center's proposed project to reduce violence among families in one Houston area ethnic-minority-dominated neighborhood by educating local pastors in mental health diagnosis and referral was correctly targeted to the Hogg Foundation. In writing the proposal to the Hogg Foundation, I translated my naturally visual wording into kinesthetic language, and the proposal was well-received. Performing a modality-based audience analysis on a mission statement or program description in a RFP, as well as a search through the content for value-laden words, before writing any grant may enable grant writers to better attune their language to that of the reviewers and, perhaps, even understand them better so as to establish a more comfortable sense of rapport, trust, and identification. This can help to establish a partnership that supports a project in which both have become invested.

### Practical experience with modality analysis

When the Samaritan Center initially applied to the Hogg Foundation to fund a project in 1999, they were not prepared for a response that required significant further clarification. I was hired by the Samaritan Center to figure out what the funder wanted. When I explained the foundation's expectation for specific kinds of content (needs, goals, objectives, and evaluation plans), and I recommended a particular communication style (kinesthetic) for writing an effective proposal, the center director was initially confused because he had read the "expert" advice on grant writing, which did not provide explanations of anything like using modality-based analysis for establishing rapport. I explained that effectively depicting the value of a project involves more than just presenting facts in one's own fashion. Instead, effective grant writers can utilize the preferred communication style of a funding source in order to create a rhetorical approach that appropriately engages the audience and clearly explains the match in the values and interests of the funding source and the organization seeking funding.

When submitting a grant proposal to a private funding agency, such as the Hogg Foundation, it is

## Modality Approach to Grant Writing

The Hogg Foundation for Mental Hygiene was created in 1940 under the leadership of sociologist Dr. Robert Lee Sutherland. Its initial mission was to educate the people of Texas about the then little-known concept of “mental hygiene” by sending experts and scholars across the state to promote the positive, preventive, and therapeutic aspects of mental health. By 1950, the Foundation’s educational mission had expanded to incorporate a communications program which was developed to produce pamphlets and radio broadcasts that responded to public concerns about the care and treatment of the mentally ill. The Foundation played a critical role in the drafting of revisions and improvements to the code governing the Texas State Hospitals and Special Schools. In 1955, the Foundation decided to complement its communications efforts by awarding grants for basic and applied research, training, and fellowships to better address emerging mental health challenges. As the 1950s ended, the Foundation changed its name to the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health.

By the 1960s, the Foundation’s grantmaking program grew to encompass projects demonstrating new ideas in mental health services, expanding the Foundation’s role to include convening, communication, research and grantmaking.

By the time psychologist Dr. Wayne Holtzman was named to succeed Dr. Sutherland as executive director, the Foundation had established itself as a leader in philanthropy across the southwest.

With Miss Ima Hogg’s passing in 1975, she bequeathed her own legacy to create the Ima Hogg Endowment to support mental health service projects dedicated to the needs of children and their families in Houston. On the passing of Dr. Sutherland, the Sutherland Chair in Mental Health & Social Policy was created at The University of Texas at Austin’s School of Social Work. In addition, the Foundation initiated a series of biennial Robert Lee Sutherland Seminars, the first being held in 1978. Over the years, the Sutherland Seminars have convened thousands to address mental health issues.

The Foundation’s continued growth through the 1980s culminated with the creation of the multi-million dollar School of the Future project, which provided an integrated spectrum of both prevention and treatment services for lower-income schools in Austin, Dallas, Houston, and

San Antonio. To this day, parts of the effort continue to operate in three of the original sites.

In 1993, Dr. Wayne Holtzman stepped down and Dr. Charles Bonjean was named the Foundation’s new executive director. Dr. Bonjean’s emphasis upon strengthening the Foundation’s work in the areas of collaboration and convening led to the sharpening of its focus upon three priority program areas: Children and Their Families, Youth Development, and Minority Mental Health.

In 2002, Dr. Bonjean retired and was succeeded by Dr. King Davis as executive director. The change in leadership prompted another opportunity to assess the Foundation’s capabilities to address emerging challenges in mental health.

### Today’s Hogg Foundation

Under Dr. Davis’ leadership, the Foundation has not only revitalized its mission, vision, and goals, but is embarking on a new chapter to making substantive contributions to mental health services, research, public policy, and public education for Texas and the nation.

Early in his tenure, ~~Dr. Davis began exploring how the~~ Foundation’s grantmaking approach could be modified to have a larger impact on the delivery of mental health services in Texas. In discussions with stakeholders around the state and nation, he determined that the Foundation could increase its leadership in the field by moving from funding unsolicited grant proposals on various topics to targeting its grant monies in Texas’ specific areas of need.

In 2005, the Foundation underwent an intensive strategic planning process to determine how best to invest its limited resources. Foundation staff held a series of meetings with numerous state and national stakeholders to assess the most pressing issues in the field, with the goal of identifying critical areas in which the Foundation could have a significant impact.

It was through this process that the Foundation selected its three priority funding areas: Integrated Health Care, Cultural Competence, and Workforce Development.

The Foundation is focusing its resources in these areas for the next several years. In moving Texas forward on each of these fronts, the Foundation will enlist its leadership and resources to achieve its mission to improve the mental health of all Texans. (Hogg Foundation for Mental Health (2006))

Figure 6. Example for Analysis: Hogg Foundation History

not unusual for the agency to engage in an ongoing relationship of mutual cooperation and oversight. This scenario is especially likely when the funding source has

**Visual words:** spectrum, focus, vision, focusing

**Auditory words:** communication, named

**Kinesthetic words:** sending, across, produce, responded, care, basic and applied, grew, encompass, demonstrating, expanding, established, create, support, service, created, held, creation, integrated, operate, sites, stepped down, strengthening, areas of collaboration, sharpening, emerging, revitalized, substantive, exploring, approach, impact, delivery, moving, targeting, held, pressing, impact, through, areas, moving, forward, fronts

**Value words/phrases:** initial mission was to educate the people of Texas about the then little-known concept of “mental hygiene”, the Foundation’s educational mission had expanded to incorporate a communications program, played a critical role in the drafting of revisions and improvements to the code governing the Texas State Hospitals and Special Schools, awarding grants for basic and applied research, training, and fellowships to better address emerging mental health challenges, established itself as a leader in philanthropy across the southwest, culminated with the creation of the multi-million dollar School of the Future project, which provided an integrated spectrum of both prevention and treatment services for lower-income schools in Austin, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio, three priority program areas: Children and Their Families, Youth Development, and Minority Mental Health, making substantive contributions to mental health services, research, public policy, and public education for Texas and the nation, three priority funding areas: Integrated Health Care, Cultural Competence, and Workforce Development, its mission to improve the mental health of all Texans.

**Assessment:** The dominant sensory modality is kinesthetic with an emphasis on values such as education and communication, research, reputation, minorities, culture, employment, and mental health.

a kinesthetic (hands-on) communication preference. Based on my targeted writing style and clear content, the Hogg Foundation and the Clear Lake Samaritan Center developed a partnership of trust, and the proposed community mental health initiative was funded. As an added bonus, it was very rewarding to be able to mediate a process of establishing rapport between two groups of people that both wanted to serve the community.

### Example of Modality Analysis Applied to a Government RFP

Modality analysis need not be restricted to foundation grants. In order to make the modality analysis process more clear, I have added an additional example involving part of a RFP for a program sponsored by the U.S. Department of the Army. The text (Figure 8) describes the purpose/goals of the program. The analysis (Figure 9) displays the results which indicate that the dominate communication modality is visual and the values include supporting early-career scientists in the eradication of breast cancer via creative means.

### Further Research and Applications are Needed

In addition to a foundation grant, I have succeeded in attaining funding from the NIH and the TEA, and I helped others use these techniques in DOE grants. My experience with several successful grants, however, is still only my experience. It would be interesting to see how many other grant writers might improve their success rates by applying modality analysis to their repertoire of techniques. I encourage other grant writers to use the ideas presented here and decide for themselves if these techniques are helpful.

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Figure 7. Analysis of Hogg Foundation History Text

## Modality Approach to Grant Writing

The Breast Cancer Research Program (BCRP) Era of Hope Scholar Award supports individuals who have high potential for innovation in breast cancer research early in their careers. Nominees should be exceptionally talented, early-career scientists who have demonstrated that they are the “best and brightest” in their field(s) through extraordinary creativity, vision, and productivity. They also should exhibit strong potential for leadership in the breast cancer research community and be able to articulate a vision for the eradication of breast cancer. Individuals should challenge current dogma and demonstrate an ability to look beyond tradition and convention. The Era of Hope Scholar Award proposal must focus on the Principal Investigator’s (PI’s) record of creative and original accomplishments, potential for leadership in the breast cancer research community, and vision for eradicating breast cancer. These aspects of the proposal will receive greater emphasis in the review process than the proposed research project, although the proposed research project also will be considered. Experience in breast cancer research is not required; however, the proposal must focus on breast cancer research and the PI must commit at least 50% of his or her full-time professional effort during the award period to breast cancer research. Individuals must be nominated to be considered for this award mechanism; self-nominations will be accepted. Do not submit an Era of Hope Scholar Award proposal unless you receive a letter of invitation.

(Dept. of the Army. <<http://www.grants.gov/search/search.do?oppld=13127&mode=VIEW>>)

**Figure 8. Example for Analysis: Dept. of The Army Program Description RFP Text**

**Visual words:** brightest, vision, vision, look beyond, focus, vision, review, focus

**Auditory words:** articulate

**Kinesthetic words:** supports, strong, emphasis

**Value words/phrases:** potential for innovation in breast cancer research, early-career scientists, the eradication of breast cancer, challenge current dogma, record of creative and original accomplishments.

**Assessment:** The dominant sensory modality is visual and kinesthetic is secondary. The emphasis is on values such as innovation, creativity, leadership, originality, and eradicating breast cancer.

**Figure 9. Analysis of Dept. of The Army Program Description RFP Text**

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