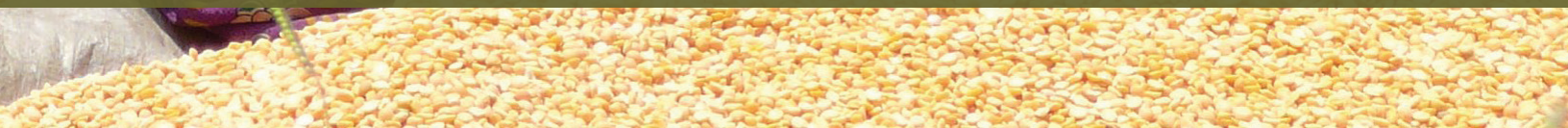
Grant Proposal and Oral Presentation Guide
Science of Living Systems 19: Nutrition and Global Health



Grant Proposal and Oral Presentation Guide Science of Living Systems 19: Nutrition and Global Health

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Introduction to the Course

This course seeks to inspire and teach the importance of global awareness in nutrition and global health. It also seeks to promote critical thinking in its students while providing a firm grounding in research methods. We want students to be able to communicate research findings in order to improve nutrition and public health.

As part of those course goals, you will complete a group project that is meant to give you experience in real-world grant writing and presentation skills. The goals of this assignment, therefore, are twofold:

1) to familiarize you with the general components of most global health and nutrition grant proposals; and,

2) to give you experience presenting your ideas to a group.

This guide is intended to help you break down the group project and give you concrete steps you can take while working on the project.

Because this assignment asks you to make your case in ways that may be unfamiliar to you, we have developed this guide. It separately covers the two components of the assignment: the format and structure of a grant proposal, and the format and structure of presenting that proposal to an audience.

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grant writing

Breaking Down Grant Writing Assignments

Part of the mission of the Program in General Education is to connect what you are learning in the classroom to life beyond Harvard. We are approaching this goal in our class through the course subject as well as by assigning work that closely parallels a critical part of global health practice: writing and presenting a grant application.

A. Understanding Grants in the Real World

What is a grant?

In global health, grants from governments and private foundations are the backbone of financial support for health and nutrition interventions. However, grants are not unique to global health. Other fields, including the visual arts, education and community organizing, require effective grant writing in order to implement successful programs. In the real world, many government agencies and donors have specific mandates and will fund projects that appropriately fit their goals and needs. Other grants will be broad in scope and will allow the applicants more flexibility.

While this class will not require students to write their grant proposals based on a specific request for proposals, one of the most important steps in grant writing is identifying the appropriate donors and the specific criteria of their Request for Proposals (RFP) or Request for Applications (RFA). This assignment, however, will enable students to practice writing a grant based on a global nutrition topic of their choice.

What are the main components of a grant proposal?

Most RFAs and RFPs will have clear specifications about the format of their grant applications. However, a general assumption is that the grant will include the following components:

1) **Executive Summary** – An umbrella statement of your case and summary of the entire proposal.

2) **Background & Rationale/Statement of Need** – An explanation of the community that will be served by this program and why this project is necessary.

3) **Program Objectives** – what is the purpose of your intervention? Be specific about the types of outcomes you want to achieve!

4) **Project Description** – What methods will you be using to implement your project? This should be the nuts and bolts of how the project will be implemented and also how it will be evaluated.

5) **Budget** - financial description of the project plus explanatory notes.

6) **Organization Information** - history and governing structure of the nonprofit or implementing institution. What are its primary activities, audiences, and services? Why is this organization particularly well suited to implement this project?

7) **Discussion** – What are the anticipated challenges and opportunities that will confront this program? How feasible and sustainable is this program? What are the implications for future work?

8) **Conclusion** - summary of the proposal's main points.

In practice, it will be important to follow the specific requirements of granting agencies and foundations. It is advisable to follow the structure and vocabulary they use. In other words, if a granting agency asks you to articulate the program goals, you will likely want to have a section titled "Program Goals" rather than "Program Aims" or "Program Objectives." When granting agencies are reading proposals, they will be looking for specific information; using their own language to frame that information can help them find what they are looking for.

B. Applying the Real World to your Assignment

Now that we have a fundamental grasp on grant proposals in the real world, we need to understand the assignment itself. The assignment aims to introduce you to grant proposals, and that means the assignment is meant to model (rather than replicate) real-world grant writing. For instance, while a detailed budget and a description of an organization's structure are critical components to successful grant applications, you will not be required to do either for this class. This makes sense. We are asking you to model the grant writing process that would address a specific problem in global health.

So what is transferable between real-world grant writing and your project? Perhaps the most transferable element of real-world grant proposals to your project is the structure of the grant. Successful group projects will likely hew closely to the assignment's stated suggested structure available in the description of the course assignment.

There is a big advantage to giving you such explicit instruction when it comes to the structure of your project. It allows you (and us) to focus on the value of the content and on your critical thinking, rather than on structure. Giving you a suggested structure will help remove one variable so you can focus more on your ideas. Please see the course assignment for details on how to structure your grant.

presenting

Speaking and Presenting Assignments

Speaking and presenting have become critical ways to deliver information, and in the world of global health, it has become equally important in creating a dialogue between granting-seeking organizations and grant makers, as well as between researchers, program-planners and policy decision makers. The goal of these presentations is to prepare students to speak confidently about important themes in Nutrition and Global Health.

C. Understanding Presentations in the Real World

What kinds of presentations do global health leaders make?

Global health leaders present in a variety of contexts, from academic institutions and conferences to government meetings, where we aim to persuade policy-makers and donors to adopt specific implementation strategies. Often, global health practitioners are only provided a limited amount of time to make their case. You must provide background about the challenges your intervention will confront while being concise about your strategy and objectives. In the fast-paced environment of Global Health, conference and meeting presentations are often limited to 15 minutes (or less).

What are the main components in this a presentation?

Presentations in the real world take on a number of forms. There are, however, major topics that these presentations will often address. They include:

1) **Background & Rationale** - statement of problem; needs assessment of target population
2) **Objective(s)** - be specific, and include primary and secondary outcomes
3) **Intervention** - definition of the proposed intervention
4) **Setting** - location, target/beneficiary population
5) **Implementation** - details of the implementation strategy
6) **Monitoring and evaluation** - define monitoring and evaluation plan – including specific outcomes, and how you plan to monitor them
7) **Sustainability / Integration with existing activities** - considerations of approaches to sustainability and integration with related activities – including standard of care
8) **Limitations** - potential limitations of your intervention
9) **Future Directions** - implications of findings – e.g., what results mean for future program, policy, clinical care, research interventions

D. Applying the Real World to your Presentation

We can more readily apply the strategies and objectives of real-world presentations to your own. This is particularly relevant in terms of the duration of the presentation (15-minutes), the content of the presentation (the nine major topics outlined above), and the structure of the presentation (that is, making strategic decisions about how much you present on any one topic).

There is one important exception that will have consequences for your presentation: in real-world presentations, it is likely that a global health organization will have one person present the proposal. In our class, each member of the group must present. This means you will need to consider how you will break down the presentation and how you will handle transitioning from person to person.

Real-world presentations often allot more time to some of these major topics. Depending on the project proposal or grant making agency, global health leaders might allocate more time to explaining the project's implementation and sustainability, or to monitoring and evaluation. In other words, a grant-seeking organization would not simply give equal time to each major topic, but instead make strategic decisions regarding the nature of the proposal and the nature of the grant makers. You will need to decide as a group how to allocate your time based on the audience you will be addressing.

E. The Elements of Effective Presentations

This guide will cover five elements of effective presentations, but they all come down to a simple rule: the visual media you use should highlight the key points of the oral presentation. The single biggest problem in presentations to a group is treating the slideshow as the presentation itself. Where most presentations go wrong is in assuming that the entire presentation should be contained within the slides. This displaces the real focus, agency and power of oral presentations: the person doing the talking.

In other words, you are the presentation, not the technology projecting behind you. This will be true of presentations in any field. This is an applicable experience in addressing an actual audience that is invested in your topic, and this means you get to be the central actor in the presentation.

At some point in your paper, you should also refer to any counterarguments that might be posed against your thesis. You need to evaluate and finally refute each counterargument in the process of proving your thesis. Be sure, however, that any counterarguments you provide present a real question or issue that a reader might have about your paper. Don't simply create a counterargument that doesn't really exist or that readers probably wouldn't have, just for the sake of including counterargument in your essay. Instead, you should look over your argument carefully and critically, and think about potential problems or criticisms that other readers might notice.

You want to keep your presentation moving forward even in the midst of changing speakers. You will want to make explicit transitions that speak directly to your audience. A good way to do this is to think like an audience member: what questions, objections, or reservations might your audience have at your transition points? You want to build those questions, objections or reservations into your transitions, and work out specific language you can use to introduce the next presenter.

The five truths of effective presentations all cluster around this take away. In short:

1) the slides are not the presentation – you are
2) use the principles of visual design
3) tell stories through images, not words
4) don't fumble with technology
5) rehearse, rehearse, rehearse

Design minimalist slides that serve to highlight key points and data of the presentation.

The Slides Are Not the Presentation - You Are

The single most common mistake we make when we prepare a presentation is assuming that the slideshow is the presentation. It may sound contradictory, but the slideshow is not the presentation. The slideshow is actually a visual supplement to an oral presentation. You are the presentation, not the technology behind you.

=> Have doubts about this? Watch any keynote address by Steve Jobs and you'll see very quickly just how sparse the projected slides are, and just how much he talks.

Behind this thinking is the realization that you have an opportunity to address a real audience when you give presentations, and this means you need to assume the central work of the presentation will be in your ability to address that audience clearly and succinctly.

So what does this mean for preparing the slides for your presentation? Here's a tested and proven process:

A single double-spaced page, or about 300 words, represents two minutes of speaking; for a 15-minute presentation, you can count on no more than seven or eight pages

1) Don't design the slides; design the talk. That is, write out what you are going to say, using language that is appropriate to addressing a live audience. However, when you give your final presentation, you want to engage with your audience (it's best not to read your speech)

2) Next, highlight hot spots. Put stars next to key moments in your talk, moments that highlight the problem, intervention, or data in your talk. These moments should be very specific – a phrase, a data point, a sentence, not an entire paragraph.

3) Finally, design slides that highlight those hot spots in your talk. You may end up making a short series of slides (read: no more than three) that highlight the evolution of that data or how you got to that hot spot in your talk, but there should be a single, principle slide associated with a specific section of your talk.

Principles of Visual Design

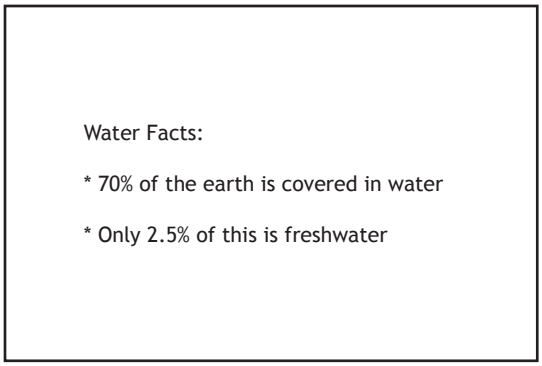
So now that you've written your talk and highlighted its hot spots, how do you begin to design those slides? You design slides by thinking about composition, color and text.

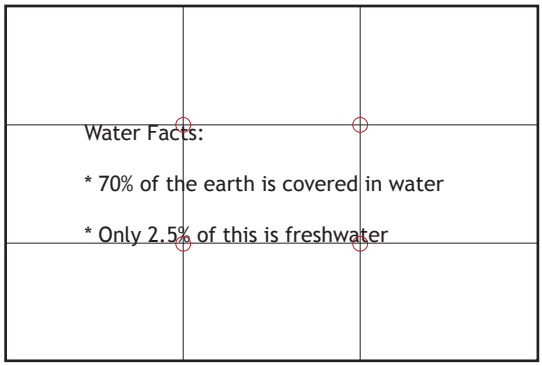
The essential principle of visual design in presentations can be broken down into composition, color and text. By composition we mean the physical layout of each slide, and by color we mean using a coordinated color palette. For text, we are referring to both the typeface and the size of the type. The presentation's composition, color and type should be consistent across your slides. There are standards you can use for each of these.

Composition

For composition, the general rule is to work with grids and "negative space," or space that is not filled with information or graphics. The photographer's "rule of thirds" applies to slide presentations: each slide is broken into thirds vertically and horizontally, and key information falls into one of the outer thirds. It may seem contradictory to avoid centering your graphics or information, but doing so creates visual movement and balance that is more engaging to an audience. It does so because it helps define the negative space that in turn puts the focus on the graphic or information.

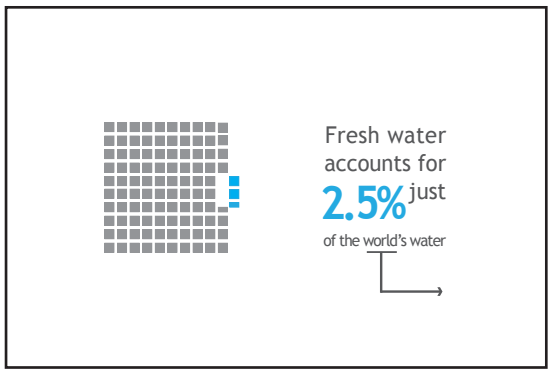
Here's an example of slides that use the rule of thirds and slides that don't:

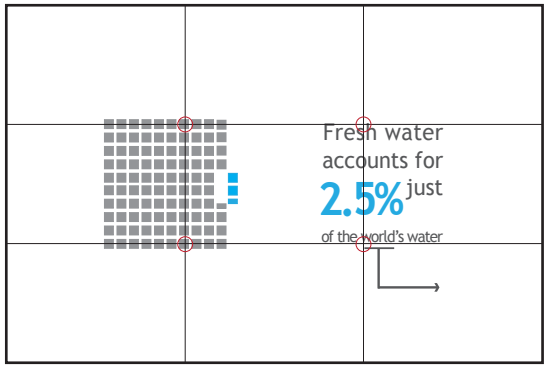




The slide here largely communicates with words that are centered on the slide. They fall on hot spots, but it seems more random than planned. There is little visual tension or interest in the composition, no sense that the creator is trying to capture an idea or tell us a story beyond the data and information.

Note that the grid's intersection points create "hot spots" or "power points."You can create visual interest and visual hierarchy by putting key information or even the focal points of your graphics at these hot spots.





The slide here has a clearer visual narrative, with a graphic that helps us visualize the information. The text is dynamic in size and color, but not radically so. The graphic and the text both seem to have been placed purposefully on the hot spots.

This photograph uses the "rule of thirds" to make an engaging, dynamic composition. But take note: it does not have to follow the rule strictly. It is best to use the rule as a guide for composition rather than a law.

Color

Start with a muted color, such as grey, and build a palette with no more than four total colors.

The colors you use in your presentation can create visual interest or dissonance, so choosing an appropriate color palette is critical in the design process. The general rule here is this: brighter colors are visually heavier, and muted colors are visually lighter. This means to achieve balance you need to use bright colors sparingly.

A simple search of "color combinations for the web" will yield designer-tested palettes you can adopt. Given the nature of your presentation on an issue of nutrition in global health, a more serious, subdued color palette is more appropriate than a color palette of reds, blues and yellows.

The background color you choose is an important consideration. A dark background tends to be more formal and better for larger audiences, since they help define more contrast (paired with light text, they are usually easier to read). A light background is more modern and informal, and works well in smaller settings like conference rooms.

Text

There are two basic rules when it comes to using text on slides: you need a neutral typeface, and it needs to be big. A simple search of web safe typefaces will yield a good set of possibilities. Sticking with sans serif typefaces like Verdana, Helvetica, and Geneva will help to limit the amount of textual information you put on any one slide, and draw attention to the information rather than to what the words look like.

Designers tend to use a "67% rule." Test your slides by zooming out to 67%; if you can easily read your text, your audience will be able to as well.

How big to make the text? This is a case where bigger is better and less is more. That is, you want to reduce the amount of text as much as possible and increase the size. In this sense, the text in a slide acts more of like a headline to what you are saying rather than telling the entire story on its own. Remember, you want your audience to be listening to you, not be distracted by large amounts of text that they have to read. In short, a presentation is different from a paper.

Tell the Stories with Images, not Words

Images tend to speak to us more than words, and this means they do a better job creating a relationship between the audience and the presentation. This is true whether

these images are photographs documenting a global health problem or graphs and figures that show us the rates of malnutrition across a continent.

So how do you construct graphics that are helpful? The short answer is this: you start with what you want your audience to know or take away from your presentation, and highlight the data that demonstrate that take away. For instance, if you want your audience to see a comparison of data, you'll want to use a bar graph; however, if you want your audience to see the conclusion they should draw from that comparison, you can simply project the data point that leads to that conclusion.

Use consistent font and colors throughout your presentation. Shift colors rarely and only to highlight key points. This will minimize distraction.

Don't Fumble with Technology

Now that you have your slides constructed and your images in place, we need to start thinking about presenting them before a live audience. This is when great talks and nicely designed slides can go terribly wrong. It all goes wrong because we fumble with the technology.

This is not an argument about how many words you should have in your presentation but an argument of where those words should be in your presentation. Your presentation should be filled with words—words that you say to an audience. When it comes to your visual presentation, you need to rely on telling the story with images.

There are many ways we can fumble with technology, from not knowing the program we're using to experiencing a power outage. But in our case, it is more likely that you will fumble with technology by having to keep going back to the computer to hit the next slide. There is nothing that breaks the rhythm of your presentation like drawing attention to the technology that is supposedly all making it happen. It's part and parcel of the problem of thinking the slides are the presentation.

If we think of ourselves as the presentation, and if we think of slides as illustrating key moments or hot spots of our talk, it means we should be able to get in front of an audience and speak, uninterrupted by having to interact with the technology behind us.

Less is more. If you want to use a complicated figure from an article or book, sometimes it is best to remake the figure yourself limiting the amount of data presented to highlight your key points.

You do this two ways: first, by using a remote, and second by making slides that play automatically. And since you have designed your presentation around your talk, and designed slides around your certain hot spots in that talk, it means that you know how long each slides needs to be on the screen. In other words, program the slide show to play automatically, so it is playing behind your ideas to reinforce them, not in front of your ideas.

In the end, all your preparation and beautiful slides will mean nothing if you fumble the talk itself.

Rehearse, Rehearse, Rehearse

One critical consequence of using slideshows that play automatically is this: you have to be able to give your talk automatically as well. In other words, you have to have your talk down pat. So, no fumbling with technology means no fumbling with your words, and that means you need to rehearse your presentation so you get comfortable with what you are saying in the time you have to say it. Knowing exactly how long it will take you to convey your key points will prevent you from feeling rushed in the last minute of your presentation.

This gets at an important element of these kinds of presentations: you are addressing an audience, and that means you need to spend most of your time talking to them, not at the screen projected behind you. The more you can visually connect with your audience, the more they will hear what you have to say.

Other Resources

resources

Resources for Writing

- The Writing Center House Writing Tutors
- House Writing Tutors
- Your Teaching Fellow

Resources for Researching

- PubMed, Jstor, Social Science Citation Index (http://guides.hcl.harvard.edu/webofscience)
- **Research librarians:**
    - Data and statistics: Diane Sredl (sredl@fas.harvard.edu)
    - Nutrition, global health, policy: Dorothy Barr (dbarr@oeb.harvard.edu)
    - Science reference librarian: Reed Lowrie (lowrie@fas.harvard.edu)
- SLS19 nutrition and global health resources page on the course website (a great resource)
- Website resources through the Harvard College Libraries (www.hcl.harvard.edu)
- Academic Technology Group (http://atg.fas.harvard.edu)

Resources for Data Presentation

- The Visual Display of Quantitative Information (www.edwardtufte.com/tufte/books_vdqi)

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