

Book Reviews

Nancy Brome and Paul Giguere

Book Review Editors

This issue features books on the visual display of information, proposal strategies for small business and style. All books have been reviewed by a member of APMP. The opinions expressed by reviewers are their own and do not represent the views of the Association of Proposal Management Professionals. Book review recommendations are welcomed by the book review editors.



SUCCESSFUL PROPOSAL STRATEGIES FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Reviewed by Nancy J. Brome

Sr. Proposal Coordinator, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of New Hampshire

Successful Proposal Strategies for Small Businesses: Winning Government, Private Sector, and International Contracts, by Robert S. Frey, Norwood, MA: Artech House, Inc., 1997, 302 pp. \$59.00, 0-89006-935-2

Robert S. Frey has more than 10 years of proposal writing experience. His experience is primarily in the federal contracting arena, specifically under the Small Business Administration's

8(a) program. Clearly, Frey has the background and knowledge to be considered an expert in his field. This, Frey's fourth book, makes a valuable contribution in revealing the mystery of government proposals. Frey states that the book serves as "a users manual consulted frequently for suggestions and guidance throughout the proposal planning and response process." His book is perfectly suited to acting as a reference document. It includes explanations of the many regulations that oversee government response documents.

This easy and fun to read book does a fine job explaining the importance of proposals as sales tools, and how proposals relate to the corporate bottom line. A theme running through the entire book is summarized by the following quote: "A proposal is, first and foremost, a sales document. To be sure, it includes a host of technical, programmatic, institutional, pricing, and certification information, but it must remain sales oriented." Starting with this premise, the text then walks the reader through the maze that comprises federal/government acquisitions. Frey presents this knowledge in an interesting introduction, 15 chapters, 5 appendices, and a helpful list of acronyms. Chapter subjects include business strategies, the federal acquisition process, proposal components, proposal costs, and writing and editing. Included in each chapter are many well thought out, well placed

figures that complement the chapter verbiage. Useful figures include sample government forms/solicitations, timelines, proposal components, and other practical visuals.

This book is best suited for proposal managers in small businesses who respond to government RFPs.

Chapter 8, *The Role of the Proposal Manager*, will be of particular interest to companies who have an undersized proposal staff. This chapter covers the unique challenges that small proposal units face.

The review process is fully explained in Chapter 5, wherein all "color" teams are defined by stating their purpose and appropriate team members.

International proposals are covered very briefly in Chapter 9. Although "international" is listed in the title of the book, this chapter provides only a high level, general overview of international proposals. An organization engaged in global proposal responses will need to supplement Chapter 9 to fully understand the foreign market place.

Overall, I enjoyed reading *Successful Proposal Strategies for Small Businesses (Winning Government, Private Sector, and International Contracts)*. It takes a talented and knowledgeable author to turn the government proposal process into pleasurable reading. I recommend this book for anyone hoping to do business with the federal government.



FRANKLIN COVEY STYLE GUIDE

Reviewed by Paul M. Giguere

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Franklin Covey Style Guide for Business
and Technical Communication, Salt Lake
City, UT: Franklin Covey Co: July 1997
(Second Printing). 440 pp. \$49.95
0-9652481-1-9

A style guide is an important tool for proposal writers. It helps guide us through the many and difficult rules of the English language, and above all, assists us in communicating a clear message to potential clients.

Selecting a style guide is no easy task. There are many to choose from, and all follow the same grammar basics. Style guides range from the *American Writers Association's Style Guide* to the *Chicago Manual of Style*, and from the *Longman Handbook for Writers and Readers* to *The Complete Idiots Guide to Grammar and Style*, to name but a few of the many available. A key word search using "style" and "guide" of the Barnes and Noble online database (www.barnesandnoble.com) produces more than 60 different style guides.

I recently had the pleasure of becoming familiar with the *Style Guide* by Franklin Covey Publishing Company, formerly known as the *Shipley Associates Style Guide*. This guide is specifically designed for the proposal writer. Topics are arranged alphabetically

and in a user-friendly format for quick reference.

In an easy to use format, each section contains a list of grammar rules pertaining to the given topic (e.g., capitals, commas, semi-colons, etc.). With each rule, the guide presents clear and precise examples for quick reader comprehension. A summary of the covered topic's rules is outlined in a shaded area on the page for quick review.

In addition to grammar and punctuation rules (as many realize, the rules of punctuation differ slightly from industry to industry, and even from writer to writer), the guide addresses other areas of interest to the proposal writer. Writing techniques such as repetition, bias-free language, formal versus informal writing, and redundancies in writing are among the topics addressed. The guide also describes rules governing lists, numbers, paragraphs, tables of contents, photographs, and color schemes. Twenty-three pages are dedicated to the effective use of graphics in proposals. The editor states that "Graphics are one of the best devices writers have to emphasize information," and provides complete details on the use of graphics in documents and presentations.

The guide also discusses proper telephone and meeting skills. It covers techniques for memos, letters, online documentation, page layout, oral presentations, and project management. Furthermore, the guide provides a section on writing summaries. While the guide provides excellent details on how to write an executive summary, I wish it had provided examples of executive summaries to complement the techniques presented.

The guide also provides a nicely detailed section on Intellectual Property. It provides a clear understanding for the proposal writer about when to use the various symbols (TM, ®, ©, and SM) and the rules governing the use of copyrighted materials.

Many other topics and techniques are covered. For a modest price of \$49.95, the *Franklin Covey Style Guide* is a nice investment for a proposal writer's reference library.



VISUAL EXPLANATIONS

Reviewed by Dr. Jayme A. Sokolow

President,
The Development Source, Inc.

Visual Explanations: Images and
Quantities, Evidence and Narrative By
Edward R. Tufte, Cheshire, CT: Graphics
Press, 1997. 156pp. \$45.00 09613921-2-8

Over the last decade, Edward R. Tufte has developed a national reputation for his original and handsomely illustrated books on the visual display of information. In each book, his goal is the same: to help people depict information visually in insightful ways.

Tufte, who teaches statistical evidence and information design at Yale University, states that *Visual Explanations* "is about *pictures of verbs*, the representation of mechanism and motion, of process and dynamics, of causes and effects, of explanation and narrative. Since such displays are often used to reach conclusions and make decisions, there is a special concern with the integrity of the content and design."

His guiding principle is deceptively simple. According to him, "clarity and excellence in thinking is very much like clarity and excellence in the display of data. When principles of design

replicate principles of thought, the act of arranging information becomes an act of insight." From cave painters to the present, Tufte thinks that the most profound and central issue in the depiction of information is the challenge of representing three or more dimensions of data on a two-dimensional surface. *Visual Explanations* is designed to help us address this challenge.

After an introductory chapter on the display of quantitative evidence, Tufte devotes most of his book to two topics: 1) displaying statistical evidence to make decisions, and 2) pictorial instructions. His first major example comes from Dr. John Snow's *On the Mode of Communication of Cholera* (1855), a study of the great 1854 London cholera epidemic. Tufte shows how Dr. Snow brilliantly used maps and other forms of visual evidence to demonstrate that cholera was being spread from a single community pump in a bad neighborhood. Once Dr. Snow convinced the Board of Guardians of St. James's Parish, the Board removed the pump-handle and the epidemic quickly subsided.

Tufte's second example comes from a more recent event—the January 28, 1986 explosion of the Challenger space shuttle. Seven astronauts died when two rubber O-rings leaked due to cold weather. Tufte explains how the engineers who designed the rocket tried to convince NASA to abort the launch by using visuals. They failed, he argues, because the visual evidence they presented was neither clear nor compelling. In their charts and graphs, the engineers failed to make a clear connection between the probable degradation of the O-ring seal and the outside temperature.

Finally, on a lighter note Tufte takes an admiring look at magicians' manuals. He considers them a model for the visual display of information because they teach the art of illusion by using

pictures and diagrams with such success.

The basic theme of *Visual Explanations* is that there are effective and ineffective ways to display data. Some reveal relationships, others do not.

After reading Tufte, proposal managers will never look at information in the same way again. In *Visual Explanations*, there is a fascinating illustration and an insightful explanation on almost every page. This very entertaining and informative book can help proposal managers use visual evidence to develop more persuasive arguments.



ENVISIONING INFORMATION

Reviewed by **Dr. Jayme A. Sokolow**
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Envisioning Information by Edward R. Tufte, Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 1990. Sixth Printing February 1998, 126pp. \$48.00, 0-9613921-1-8

According to Edward Tufte, *Envisioning Information* "is about pictures of nouns (maps and aerial photographs, for example, consist of a great many nouns lying on the ground). *Envisioning* also deals with visual strategies for design: color, layering, and interaction effects."

Tufte presents his readers with a deceptively simple goal. On paper, all communications take place in a static and staid two-dimensional environment he calls flatland. But the world is

complex, dynamic, and multidimensional. Tufte's solution is to escape flatland by using pictures effectively.

Tufte is very creative when it comes to the display of visual evidence. *Envisioning Information* contains numerous examples from such sources as train schedules, pictorial guides to Japanese shrines, 16th century illustrations about Euclid's geometry, patterns of Renaissance dances, and charts of contemporary law school aptitude test results. The result is dizzying. The entire visual world is Tufte's oyster, and he uses an incredibly wide variety of pictures to make his points in original ways.

According to Tufte, the history of information display and statistical graphics centers around ways to present information in all its density, complexity, and beauty. Good visual displays, he passionately argues, should encourage a diversity of viewer understandings. In his words, "unlike speech, visual displays are simultaneously a wideband and a perceiver-controllable channel."

Tufte illustrates this point by examining five kinds of visual displays: micro/macro readings; layering and separation; small multiples; color and information; and narratives of space and time. Through his analysis, Tufte shows us why some visual displays are more persuasive and memorable than others.

Although Tufte never addresses proposals in his book, his guidance is relevant to those in our profession.

Our task, he would argue, is to create informative visual approaches to display the huge amounts of information found in our proposals. After reading *Envisioning Information*, this task becomes a little easier. APMP