| Words to avoid in proposals | |
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| Crutch words – used when writers don’t understand what to say | |
| We understand… | Never use the word “understand” in a proposal, other than in a section heading. To say “we understand your requirements” obfuscates any understanding and is, by definition, an unsubstantiated claim. On the other hand, if you say something insightful about how you will fulfill the requirements, the reader will see that the bidder understands the requirements. Understanding should be demonstrated, not claimed. |
| Leverage our experience… | “Leverage” is a word that some writers use when they know there is an advantage to be gained, but they don’t know how to do it. Explain “how” rather than infer. Do not use “leverage” in proposals unless you are talking about a mechanical lever and fulcrum. |
| Thank you for the opportunity… | Means, “We are desperate for your business and don’t really belong in the market.” |
| We look forward to… | Just provide a call to action. If the RFP allows it, simply state when you will contact them to schedule an oral or finalist presentation. Make sure to follow the timeline addressed in the RFP. |
| Boasting words – these exaggerate or overstate facts,  causing loss of credibility | |
| state-of-the-art | This is overused and is probably not credible. |
| the right choice | Prove it. |
| uniquely qualified, unique, very unique | Prove it. |
| best of breed/class | Prove it. |
| premier, world-class, world-renowned | Can’t be proven. Using it is wasting the evaluators’ attention. |
| industry best practices, industry standard | Overused, unless recognized as such by an independent 3rd party. |
| leading company, leading edge, leading provider, industry leader, pioneers, cutting edge, etc. | Overused and not believable. Don’t damage your credibility by using it. |
| Vague, useless words – these provide little value to the reader | |
| we are committed | Customers don’t want your commitment, they want results. |
| we are quality focused | This is another way of stating your intentions. Instead of focusing on quality, deliver it. |
| we value | Instead of valuing it, deliver it. |
| our mission is to | This is just another way of stating your intention. |
| dedicated to | Your dedication is not relevant to whether you have delivered or not. |
| top-quality | Is there any other kind? |
| full service | What exactly does that mean and is it credible? |
| comprehensive | As opposed to? |
| fastest growing | Your ability to grow rapidly may not be a selling point to your customer. |
| trustworthy | I don’t know about you, but when I hear that, I tend to run the other way. |
| customer first | This is not believable. Everyone knows there are limits to what you will do for your customers. Don’t strain your credibility. |
| maximize | What exactly does that mean? Be specific. |
| minimize | What exactly does that mean? Be specific. |
| optimize | What exactly does that mean? Be specific. |
| holistic | What exactly does that mean? Be specific. |
| synergistic | What exactly does that mean? Be specific. |
| robust | What exactly does that mean? Be specific. |
| Weak words – these weaken the bidder’s argument  and cause doubt in the minds of evaluators | |
| Don’t use | **Use** |
| we believe, think, or feel | Who cares? The customer doesn’t care what you think. Take whatever you were about to say, turn it into a positive action, and state the benefits to the customer. |
| we will strive, try, or attempt | Customers don’t want you to try, they want you to deliver. |
| we would be honored | This is just another way of saying how you feel and talking about yourself instead of making it about the customer. |
| we are pleased to submit | Of course you are! Does that phrase do anything other than waste the evaluators’ time and attention? |
| we are committed | Customers don’t want your commitment, they want results. |
| our highest priority | This is like saying it’s your greatest intention. |
| we can provide | Either you provide it, or you don’t. |
| we are involved in | Too vague. State what you are doing. |
| our mission is to | This is just another way of stating your intention. |
| we desire your business | Of course you do! But, your proposal should not be about your needs, it should be about the customer’s needs. |
| we intend to | Either you do it, or you don’t. Who cares what your intentions are. |
| we are devoted to | This is just another way of saying you intend to. |
| we hope | That’s like saying you intend to, but you’re not sure you’ll be able to. |
| Phrases with hidden verbs – replace with action verbs | |
| Don’t use | **Use** |
| arrived at the conclusion  came to an agreement | concluded  agreed |
| gave a demonstration  gave an explanation | demonstrated  explained |
| has a requirement for | requires |
| has a need for | needs |
| held a meeting | met |
| made a payment | paid |
| performed an analysis of | analyzed |
| Redundant Words – simplify to write concisely | |
| Don’t use | **Use** |
| 6-month period | 6 months |
| a number of | several |
| able to | can |
| accordingly | so |
| acquainted with | know |
| acted as | was |
| actual experience | experience |
| advance planning | planning |
| advance reservations | reservations |
| advance warning | warning |
| along the lines of | like, similar to |
| any and all | all, any, every (or leave out) |
| as to | about |
| basic fundamentals | basic or fundamentals |
| capable of | can |
| close proximity | proximity |
| combined experience | This is a faux metric. Use *average number of years’ experience*. |
| consensus of opinion | consensus |
| consequently | so |
| deteriorate in quality | deteriorate |
| discontinue | stop |
| each and every | each |
| end result | result |
| estimated roughly at | estimated at |
| exact same | same |
| filled to capacity | filled |
| first and foremost | first, foremost |
| for backup purposes | for backup |
| for the purpose of | for, to |
| functioned as | was |
| furthermore | then |
| give an affirmative answer to | say yes to, agree to |
| good advantage | advantage |
| if and when | if |
| in a teaching situation | in teaching |
| in accordance with | by |
| in addition | also |
| in an effort to | to |
| in as much as | since, because |
| in favor of | for, to |
| in order to | to |
| in the case of | if |
| in the event that | if |
| in the nature of | like |
| in the neighborhood of | about |
| in this day and age | today |
| issue a reminder | remind |
| join together | join |
| in order to [verb] | to [verb] |
| new innovation | innovation |
| on a [daily, weekly, monthly] basis | daily, weekly, monthly |
| on the basis of | by |
| on the grounds that | because, since |
| past experience | experience |
| past history | history |
| plan ahead | plan |
| prior to | before |
| reason is because | reason is |
| regular routine | routine |
| responsible for managing | managed, manages |
| suddenly exploded | exploded |
| throngs of people | throngs |
| twelve noon | noon |
| utilize | use |
| with a view to | to |
| with reference to | about (or leave out) |
| with regard to | about (or leave out) |
| with the result that | so that |
| Unnecessary qualifiers – avoid these or if used,  substantiate your assertions | |
| actually | now and again |
| all | obviously |
| always | occasionally |
| best | of course |
| certainly | quite |
| comparatively | rather |
| definitely | relatively |
| exactly | respectively |
| finest | sharpest |
| heaviest | some |
| I am absolutely certain | sometimes |
| I guess/know/think | somewhat |
| it goes without saying | sort of |
| kind of | specific |
| lowest/highest cost/risk/confidence | thoroughly |
| maybe | totally |
| more or less | usually |
| most | utterly |
| needless to say | very |
| never | wholly |
| none | Worst |

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| Needlessly long words – replaced with short, simple words | |
| Long word | **Replacement** |
| ascertain | learn |
| encompass | include |
| endeavor | try |
| enumerate | list |
| fabricate | make |
| fluctuate | vary |
| illustrate | show |
| indispensable | vital |
| initiate | start |
| irregardless | This is not a real word – use *regardless* |
| methodology | methods |
| modification | change |
| obfuscate | hide, confuse (better yet – use a positive statement using *clarify*) |
| orientate | This is not a real word – use *orient* |
| preventative | preventive |
| recapitulate | review |
| reproduction | copy |
| subsequent | after |
| substantial | large |
| termination | end |
| terminology | terms |
| utilization | use |
| Slang words – use in everyday speaking, but not in proposals | |
| hit the ground running | well-seasoned managers |

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| Legal words – if used, make sure you intend to comply  with the legal definition | |
| assure | ensure |
| guarantee | insure |