TOP TEN TIPS FOR WRITING CONCISELY

   - Be able to articulate your overall objective and specific goals for the project clearly and use those to organize the remainder of the proposal
   - Be able to convey why your project should be seen as valuable to funding agencies/reviewers
   - Know who your reviewers are: Within your (sub)field? General scientific audience? Lay audience?

2. Eliminate Empty Phrases and "Throat Clearing" Sentences
   - Empty phrases: Plant allergens may be allergens due to the fact that because they resemble microbial pathogens that the immune system has the ability to recognize.
   - "Throat clearing" sentences are those than anyone could have written: Cardiovascular disease is a leading cause of death is less compelling than identifying the particular aspect of cardiovascular disease you will be investigating.

3. Use Jargon and Acronyms Sparingly
   - Be aware of the conventions for your (sub)field and audience when choosing the amount of jargon you use. As a general rule, write grant proposals for a scientifically literate audience, assuming that some reviewers will not be a part of your (sub)field.
   - Acronym density makes proposals more difficult to read. Use common acronyms (e.g., DNA), but be careful about creating your own. Always define potentially unfamiliar acronyms the first time they are used, and again if you haven't used them in more than a page.

4. Be Aware of Emphasis
   - Within sentences, your main idea should be in your primary clause because that's where the emphasis should be.
   - Put less flattering (or information you wish to de-emphasize) in the subordinate clause.
   - Ex: While we are confident that our preliminary data support that it is ideal for our experiments, this method has never been used before on this scale is far less strong than While it has not been used on this scale, our preliminary data support that this method is ideal for our experiments.

5. Choose 1st Person or 3rd Person
   - 1st person (I, we) creates a sense of immediacy and intimacy; use for most grant proposals and for less formal writing (an exception is the abstract of NSF proposals, which should be in 3rd person per guidelines).
   - 3rd person (avoids personal pronouns) creates distance between writer and audience and tends to force the use of passive voice: The experiments will be completed in the first year (3rd person) vs. We will complete the experiments in the first year (1st person).
   - For grant proposals, a combination of 1st and 3rd person is often used to provide sentence structure variety or to make the person doing the action in the sentence ambiguous. The guideline is to be aware of these choices and to use the most effective structure for your proposal.

6. Place Subordinate Clauses Appropriately
   - Main clauses can stand alone as complete sentences, while subordinate clauses provide additional information supporting the main clause.
   - Sentences are clearer when subordinate clauses are placed at the beginning or end of sentences rather than between a subject and verb.
   - Ex: Nepal, a small, landlocked country situated between India and Tibet, with a population of approximately 27 million, is typical of many developing countries struggling to control tuberculosis (less clear) vs. A small, landlocked country situated between India and Tibet, with a
population of approximately 27 million, Nepal is typical of many developing countries struggling to control tuberculosis (more clear).

7. Make Certain Pronoun Antecedents Are Clear
- Pronouns include this, that, those, these, he, she, it, they, and we. When using this, these, and those, it's better to follow them with a noun to clarify what the pronoun refers to.
- Ex: Nepal struggles to control tuberculosis among its population of approximately 27 million people. This public health challenge is typical of many developing countries.

8. Avoid Overusing Nominalization and to be+ Nouns or Verbs
- Nominalization, or the noun form of verbs, creates unnecessary wordiness. Use the FIND feature of your word processing program to locate all cases of words ending in –tion to see if the sentence can be written more concisely and clearly.
- Ex: More than 96% of Tufts undergraduates indicate an intention to pursue graduate or professional degrees after college.
- Often accompanying nominalization, the use of to be (helping verbs) + verbs or nouns can increase the number of words you use and decrease the strength of your prose.
- Ex: A key component of this proposal is the development of inquiry-based experiments that are integrated into all lab offerings (less strong; wordier) vs. As a key component of this proposed project, we will develop inquiry-based experiments and integrate them into all lab offerings.

9. Avoid There and It + to be
- Often, beginning sentences with There + to be or It + to be reduces the impact of the sentence, in addition to adding unnecessary words. Evaluate each case to see if the sentence can be rewritten.
- Ex: It is the norm at Tufts that undergraduates are mentored by a network of faculty members in addition to graduate students and postdocs (less impact) vs. At Tufts, undergraduates are typically mentored by a network of faculty members, graduate students, and postdocs.

10. A Last Resort
- Formatting tricks can help save space, but often at the expense of an easy to read document. Thus, they should only be used as a last resort.
- Examples of tricks include 1) reducing white space between paragraphs (e.g., use 4-pt or 6-pt space instead of a full 11-pt space); 2) identify paragraphs that have only a few words on the last line, and edit to bring them up; 3) reduce font size (where you can – we do not recommend fonts below 11 pt); 4) hyphenation (use sparingly); and 5) turn off autoformatting of titles, paragraphs (e.g., widow-orphan control), etc.
- Importantly, make sure you follow all guidelines for font/font size, margins, and spacing!