bulletpoint

How to write a GOVERNMENT GRANT APPLICATION

BEN CUSACK

OVERVIEW

There are a few main elements you need to nail if you want to increase your chances of getting a government grant.

Much of what makes you look good to a grant reviewer comes down to making clear a few key things.

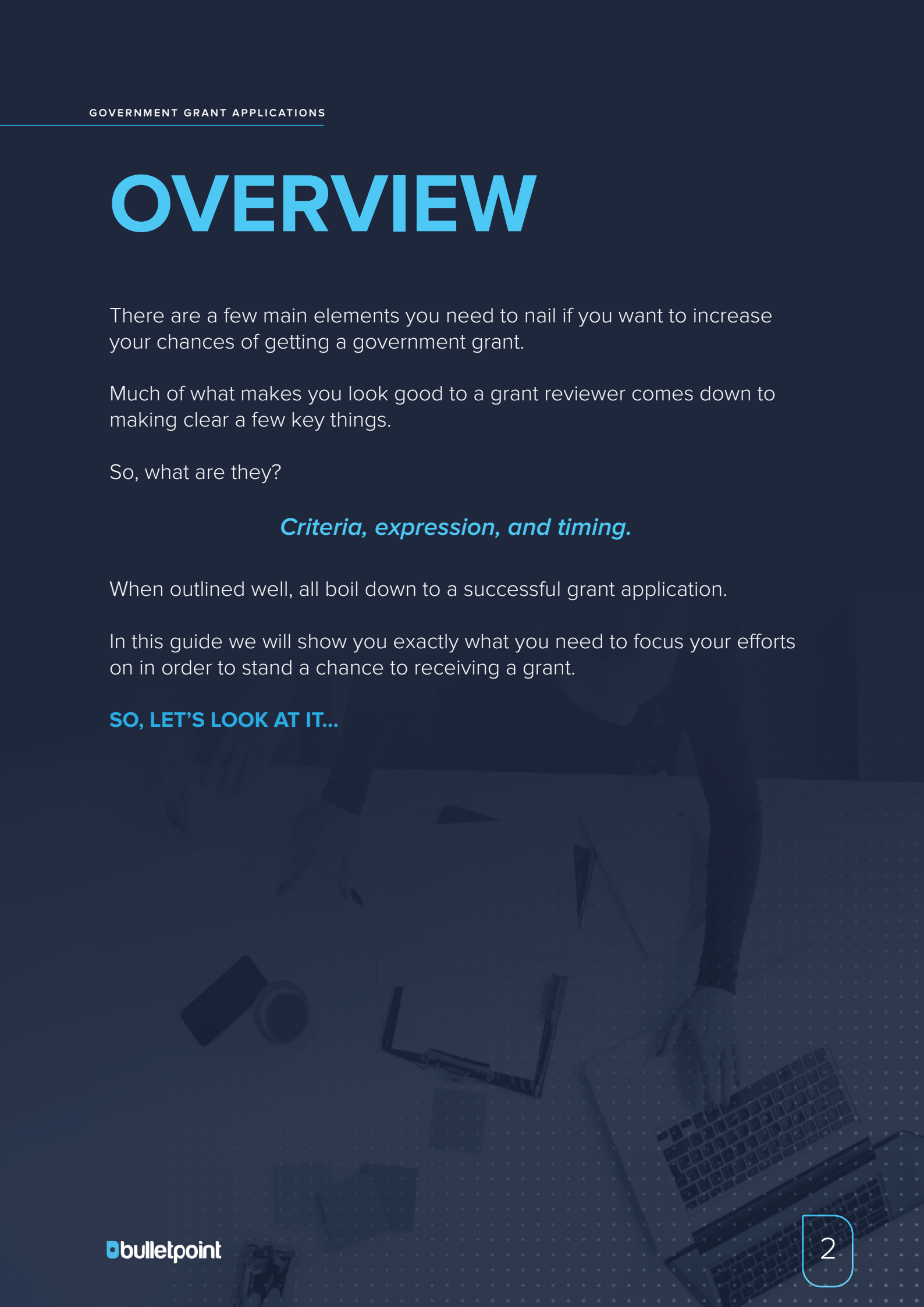
So, what are they?

Criteria, expression, and timing.

When outlined well, all boil down to a successful grant application.

In this guide we will show you exactly what you need to focus your efforts on in order to stand a chance to receiving a grant.

SO, LET'S LOOK AT IT...



TIP #1: *What is the* WOW

Almost every application that is successful has something that makes it stands out.

Often, an unsuccessful application overlooks some cool features of their project or company that they could emphasise better.

The government wants to be able to cut the ribbon and do a media release on a trail blazing company that is doing something different.

Start with a one-page summary of your company and project. Make this stand out first before diving into the detail.

If you don't highlight this in your application, you will be overshadowed by the ones that do.

WHAT IS THE "WOW" FACTOR OF YOUR APPLICATION—PUT IT FRONT AND CENTRE.

Then base your application around it.

EXPERT TIPS

- *Have a friend read your one-page summary, find out what they take from your description.*
- *Write and rewrite and rewrite—the first of anything you write won't be good, but it gets better.*

“LIFE IS TOO SHORT *for* NON-WOW PROJECTS.”

– TOM PETERS

TIP #2: *Look* GOOD

The government likes to jump on a good thing and say they helped them.

They want to dish out funds to companies that look like they probably would have completed the work anyway—it's their way of making their investments look sound.

They are very risk adverse!

You need to set yourself up to look like a business with a great track record of success.

Your application should include information that outlines:

- *Jobs* - being created the project
- *Revenue* - forecasted domestic sales figures
- *Exports* - estimated sales figures
- *Innovation* – cool technology in the company or project
- *Partnerships* – consortiums that help build the industry

Look at other recipients of similar grants. What aspects have the Government highlighted that are important to them.

EXPERT TIPS

- *Do some historical and forecast financial analysis*
- *Find some growth metrics*
- *Demonstrate how you will grow the industry*

“IF YOU *don’t look good,* WE *don’t look good.*”

– VIDAL SASSOON

TIP #3: *Start* EARLY

If you find a grant online that hasn't opened yet, don't wait for it to be open to start, as they can take 40+ hours to write.

The main thing that inhibits good applications is running out of time. Most successful applicants didn't start the application the night before!

Look for previous grant applications or ones in other industries or Government departments.

Focus on the most common, grant-crossing content required:

- *Who are you?*
- *What do you sell?*
- *What is the project?*
- *How does the project align to the merit criteria?*
- *Who is managing the project?*

If you have a rough collection of content ready to go beforehand, you can begin shaving it down to something more coherent.

REMEMBER, YOU CAN NEVER HAVE TOO MUCH INFORMATION—IT'S EASIER TO EDIT SOMETHING DOWN THAN PRODUCE SWATHS OF ADDITIONAL CONTENT.

EXPERT TIPS

- *Draft the content early, so it can be dropped into one or more grant applications.*
- *Have one person as the editor – make it look consistent*

"START TODAY, NOT TOMORROW.
If anything,
YOU SHOULD HAVE STARTED YESTERDAY.
The earlier you start,
THE MORE TIME YOU HAVE TO MESS UP."

– EMIL MOTYCKA

TIP #4: *Be* SUCCINCT

The crux of an application is its merit criteria.

This is where you are expected to provide direct, well-written responses that directly address the grant's key merits.

This section is judged, harshly.

YOU SHOULD BE FOCUSSING 90% OF YOUR TIME MAKING SURE THIS SECTION IS BOTH COHERENT AND WELL-RESEARCHED—BUT MOSTLY, THAT IT IS SUCCINCT.

A scattershot approach won't swing you a grant, because if you're adequately appealing to the grant's merits, you will quickly find the word restrictions are oppressive.

You should make your work as easy to follow as possible:

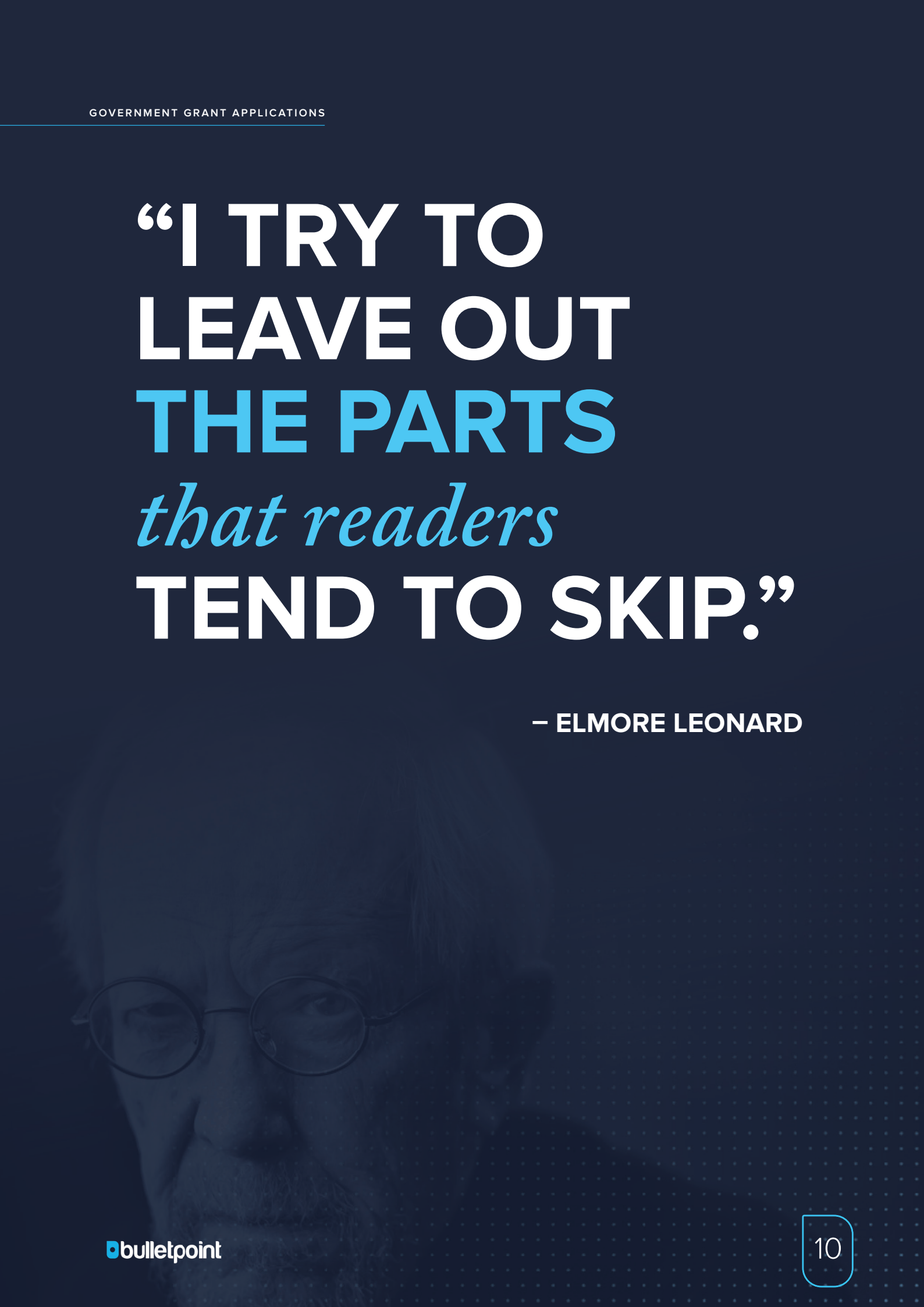
- *Keep the language simple and active, e.g. "use" rather than "utilise", "help" rather than "facilitate"; and*
- *Use short, sharp sentences: anything that strays into the realms of winding syntax and large paragraphs of content is not what should end up in your final version.*

EXPERT TIPS

- *Avoid complex and dense language—your audience is a grant reviewer, not a literary scholar*
- *Have an external person (friend, spouse) read the application and see if they comprehend your points*

"I TRY TO LEAVE OUT THE PARTS *that readers* TEND TO SKIP."

– ELMORE LEONARD



TIP #5: WAFFLE

Contradictory to the previous section, there are certain parts of the application where it is quite permissible to waffle. More the better!

General questions or application attachments can be perfect grounds to prove how robust your planning and documentation is.

This is where you can lay down content that big notes your company. Think:

- *Business plans, marketing and export plans*
- *Staff bio and project track records*
- *Risk management plans, environmental plans*
- *Company forecasts financials, ratios, growth rates and assumptions*
- *Supplier quotes, architectural drawings, artist impressions*

Make sure you respond to each general question. If you don't have an answer or attachment, Google it and use what you found as a template.

This section is marked more by volume than content.

EXPERT TIPS

- *Provide a detailed response to the general questions, whether it be genuine or a made-up one*
- *You are never penalised for less attachments or more detailed responses if there is no word limit.*

“YOU CAN ALWAYS EDIT *a bad page.* YOU CAN’T EDIT *a blank page.*”

– JODI PICOULT

TIP #6: *Get Your* CASH

One thing to strengthen an application is to prove you can fund part of the project yourself; or, at least, provide additional value to the Government.

REMEMBER, THE GOVERNMENT IS RISK ADVERSE, THEY LIKE A SURE THING.

The biggest thing you can do in the funding section is eliminate funding risks.

Make sure your estimates are accurate and account for as much as possible (project management, post-project audit fees).

Try to de-risk the funding section by providing cash in this order:

1. *Cash* - print your bank statement
2. *Bank loans* - these take a while to get (if at all)
3. *Investor funds* - hard to prove they are locked in
4. *Future Cash flows* – risky, as you might make a loss!

One of the biggest things that makes you a good investment (low risk) is if you have the matching funds to get started.

It also proves you know how to manage cash and potentially Government funds.

EXPERT TIPS

- *You can use evidence of your own funds, but once you get the grant you can use whatever cash you want (ie bank loan)*
- *If you have too much cash – identify why it can't be used for the project*

“THE ONLY PEOPLE *that a bank will loan money to* IS THE VERY PEOPLE WHO DON’T NEED IT.”

– MARK TWAIN

TIP #7: *Be Shovel* READY

A reviewer wants to know that you will hit the ground running.

They want you to have everything organised and be ready to go once you've signed that contract, so make this clear in your pitch.

Obtain as many necessary quotes, permits, approvals and plans together.

Get your ducks in a row!

Remember, your aim is to de-risk this project (and grant application)

It's the reviewer's job to identify risks, so go out of your way to acknowledge where the risk might exist and then counter with what you've already done to address this.

YOUR APPLICATION SHOULD LEAVE THE READER WITH LITTLE DOUBT THAT THE PROJECT CAN BEGIN IMMEDIATELY.

EXPERT TIPS

- *Outline the exact permits and quotes you need and cite application references/numbers*
- *Detail the exact staff required and indicate which staff you have already engaged and/or how you will engage the remaining staff*

"CHAMPIONS DO NOT BECOME CHAMPIONS WHEN THEY WIN THE EVENT, *but in the hours, weeks, months and years* **THEY SPEND PREPARING FOR IT. THE VICTORIOUS PERFORMANCE ITSELF** *is merely the demonstration* **OF THEIR CHAMPIONSHIP CHARACTER."**

– ALAN ARMSTRONG

TIP #8: *Inform the* READER

Your crucial job in a grant application is informing an otherwise ignorant party.

Don't start the application by launching into your most technical and detailed innerworkings, overwhelming the reader with your state-of-the-art technology.

Think of your application like a pyramid—start at the top, simple and focused, and work your way down, growing in breadth and detail.

Think of this pitch as a series of revelations:

1. *Who are you?*
2. *What are you developing?*
3. *Why are you developing it?*
4. *Where are you planning to develop it?*
5. *When are you planning to do it?*

THE SIMPLE WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE AND WHYS SEEM BASIC, BUT BASIC IS MORE OFTEN THAN NOT MORE EFFECTIVE THAN TREATING THE APPLICATION LIKE A THESIS.

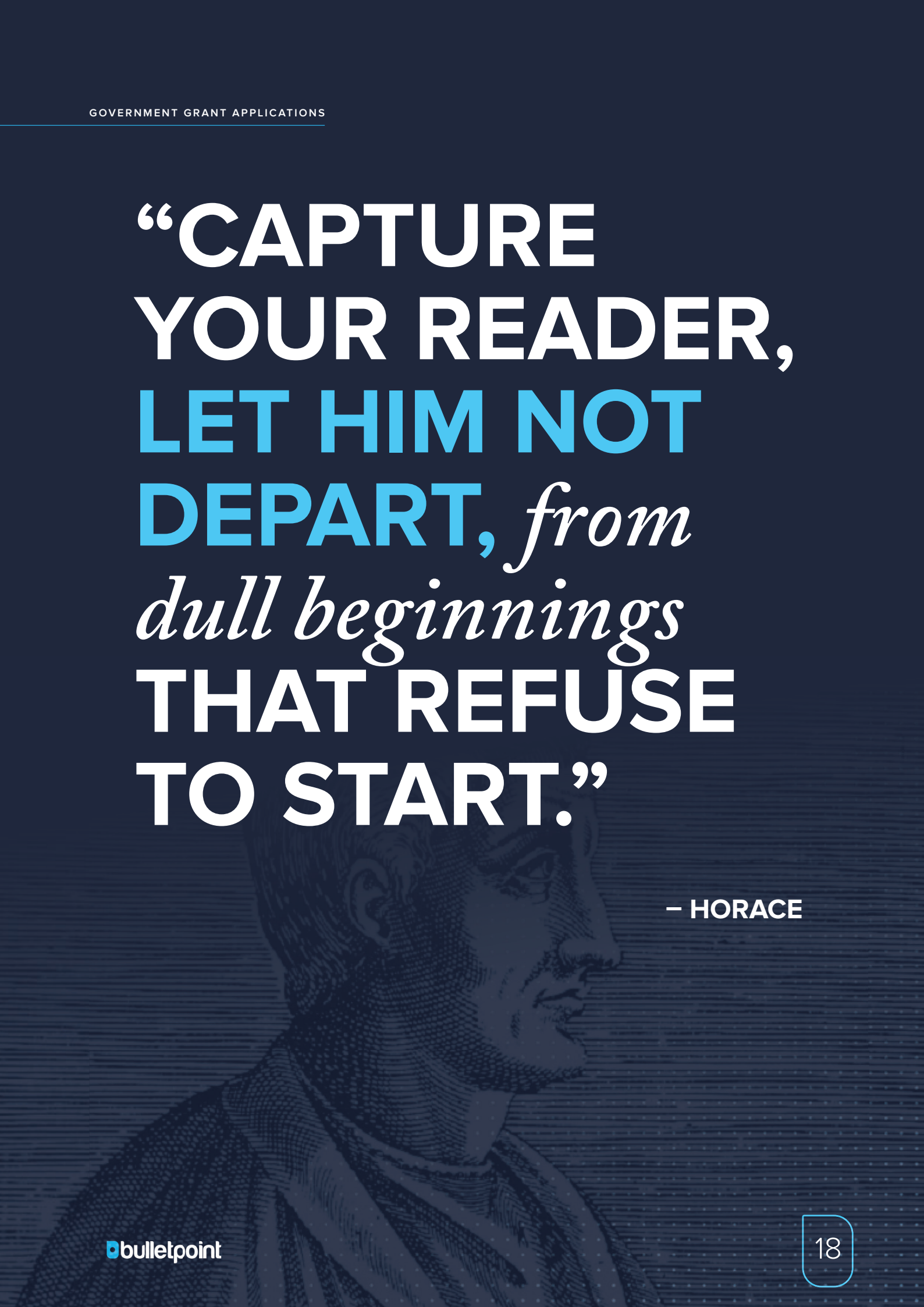
Avoid making leaps in content—don't assume the reader knows what you are talking about.

EXPERT TIPS

- *Make liberal use of headings to coherently structure your work for the reviewer. Let the reader know what they are going to read before they read it.*
- *Avoid walls of text, your reviewer is human and bound to be sent to sleep by this.*

"CAPTURE YOUR READER, LET HIM NOT DEPART, *from dull beginnings* THAT REFUSE TO START."

– HORACE



TIP #9: *Online* FORMS

Most government grant application forms are now online.

This means, gone are the days when you could add colour, images and just generally give your application its own little touch.

Left in its natural form, it is going to look like a slab of text.

Hardly easy to read!

However, you can implement some simple structural changes that improve the readability.

Tips to make it easier to read:

- *Use dot points! People have an aversion to including dot points in their writing, but this is a simple and direct way of writing;*
- *Space your work—every paragraph, every heading, including double spaces after every new section; and*
- *When using headings, WRITE THEM IN UPPERCASE. This will help the reviewer know which components you are responding to.*

EXPERT TIPS

- *Put all your content into a Word document first. Makes it easy for everyone to edit it easily. You can also cut and paste into the form as needed*
- *Avoid walls of text, your reviewer is human and bound to be sent to sleep by this.*

"TELL THE READERS A STORY! BECAUSE WITHOUT A STORY, *you are merely using words* **TO PROVE YOU CAN STRING THEM TOGETHER** *in logical sentences."*

– ANNE MCCAFFREY

TIP #10: *Break long questions into* MULTIPLE STATEMENTS

The government tends to structure very long questions with multiple parts to them.

The best advice here is to extract each individual point and separate them.

For example, you may get a question like, “What is your capacity, capability and resource to deliver the project?”

Your structural breakdown of this question could look something like:

- *Project Management* - The project will be led by....
- *Track Record* - Our track record of managing similar projects...
- *Key Personnel* - They key personnel will be...
- *Measurement* – Success of the project will be measured by...
- *Risk Management* – The major risks to the project are...

Avoid responding in convoluted answers. It is very hard to hit multiple targets.

Their questions won’t always state exactly what they want to hear, which is why you need to break it down to give yourself the best chance of responding.

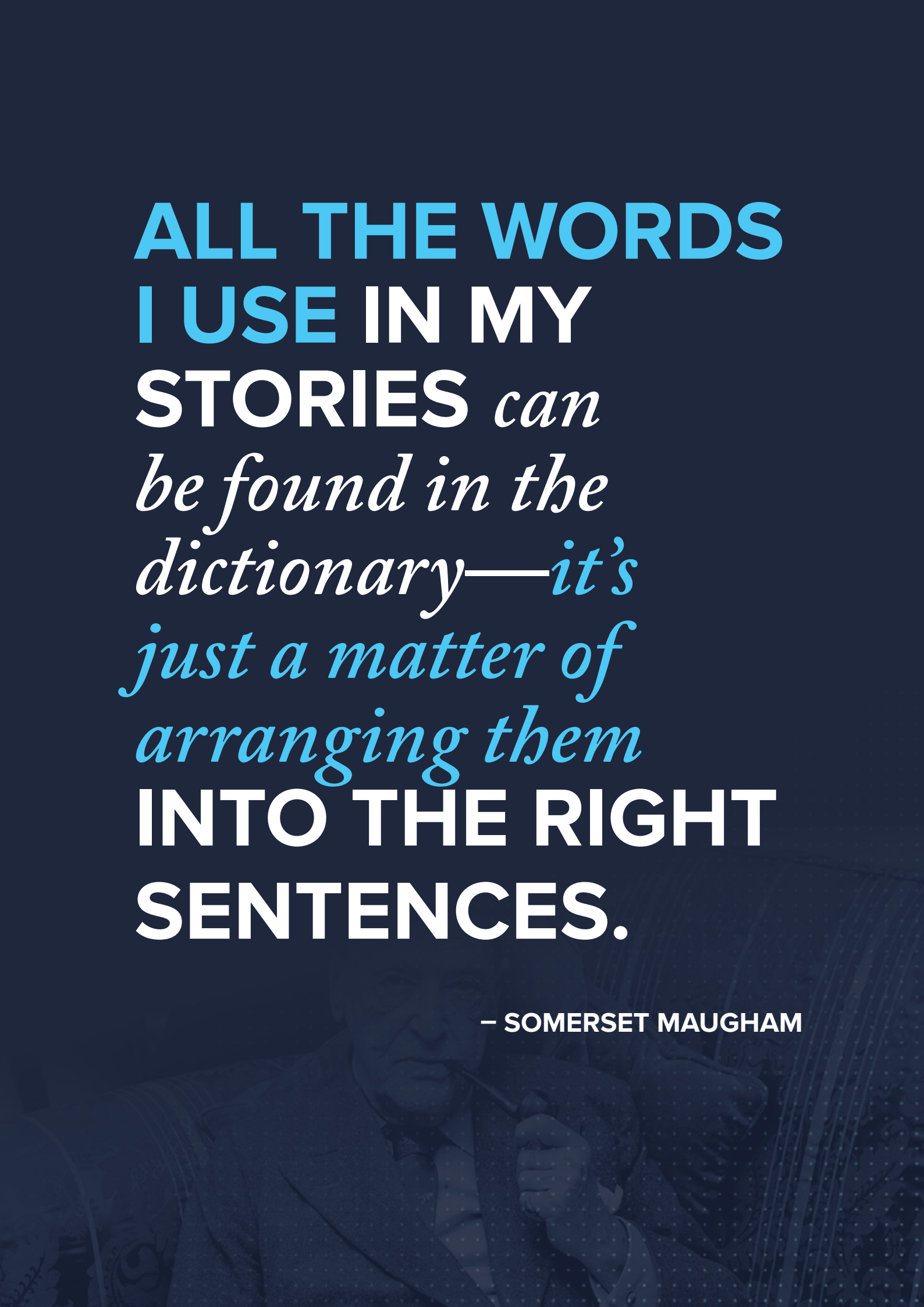
It also makes meeting the word count easier to manage as you can see where you spent too much time waffling.

EXPERT TIPS

- *You can include many more headings that reflect what the government wants to know in each section (milestones, budget, etc.)*
- *Keep the grant objectives in mind—what is it they want to hear?*

ALL THE WORDS I USE IN MY STORIES *can be found in the dictionary—it's just a matter of arranging them* **INTO THE RIGHT SENTENCES.**

– SOMERSET MAUGHAM



TIP #11: *Get your Mum to* READ IT

This is something you may do halfway through writing it, or when you're in the refining stages.

The easiest way to confirm if you have produced something clear, is to have an outsider read it.

Get someone who is not familiar with your business or product and see if they understand your project and its goals are.

KEEP IN MIND, YOU DON'T WANT SOMEONE WHO IS GOING TO COME AT IT AS THE POLICE OF PUNCTUATION OR GRAMMAR—THIS IS NOT RELEVANT!

You need reflections on the content, not your ability to proofread.

If you have no one to help you read it, try printing it out, or reading the content highlighted or in a different typeface.

Reading on paper is different to reading on the screen and changing the typeface or highlighting the content forces your brain to interpret it differently.

EXPERT TIPS

- *This isn't school, you aren't going to lose marks for bad spelling or grammatical issues—content is what is paramount here*
- *Get it in early – at the latest the day before. Getting it done, is better than perfect. Grant reviewers have more time to read early submissions*

AOCCDRNIG TO A RSEEARCH SDUTY AT CMABRIGDE UINERVTISY, IT DEOSN'T MTTAER IN WAHT OREDR THE LTTEERS IN A WROD ARE, THE ONLY IPRMOETNT TIHNG IS TAHT THE FRIST AND LSAT LTTEER BE IN THE RGHIT PDAE. THE RSET CAN BE A TOATL MSES AND YOU CAN SITLL RAED IT WOUTHIT PORBELM. TIHS IS BCUSEAE THE HUAMN MNID DEOS NOT RAED ERVEY LTETER BY ISTLEF BUT THE WROD AS A WLOHE.

– INTERNET