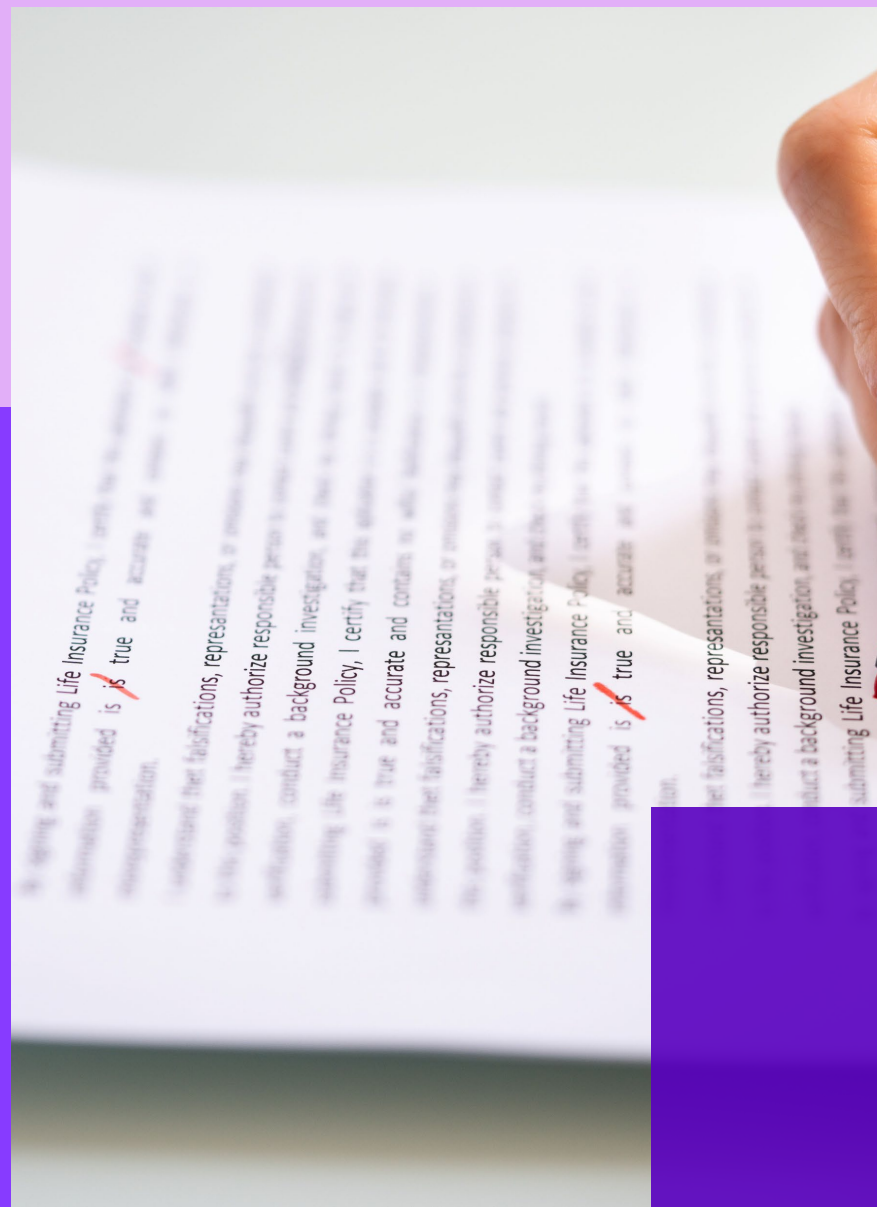


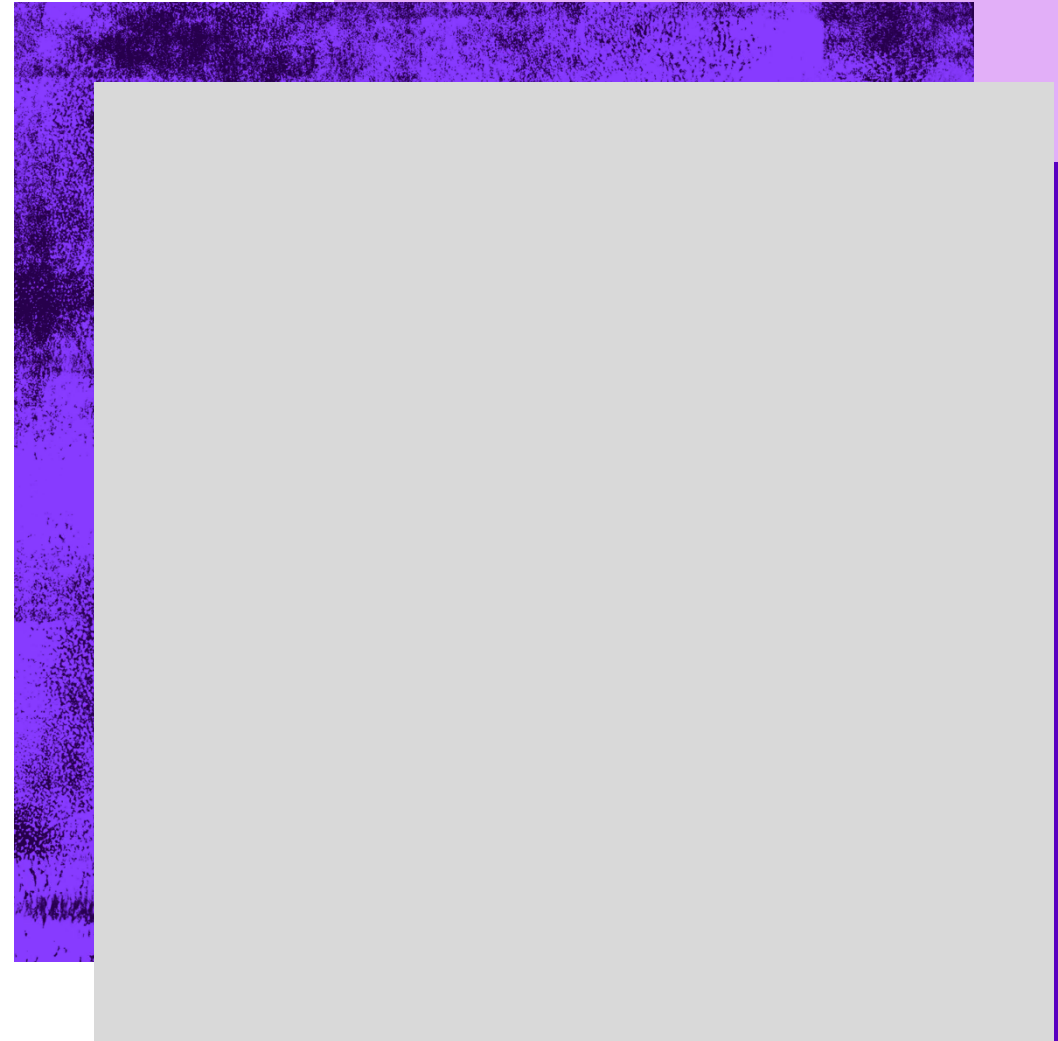
Grant Writing Foundations

Practical Training for Researchers in
Thailand, Cambodia and Laos



Presenter Biography

Pouria



Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

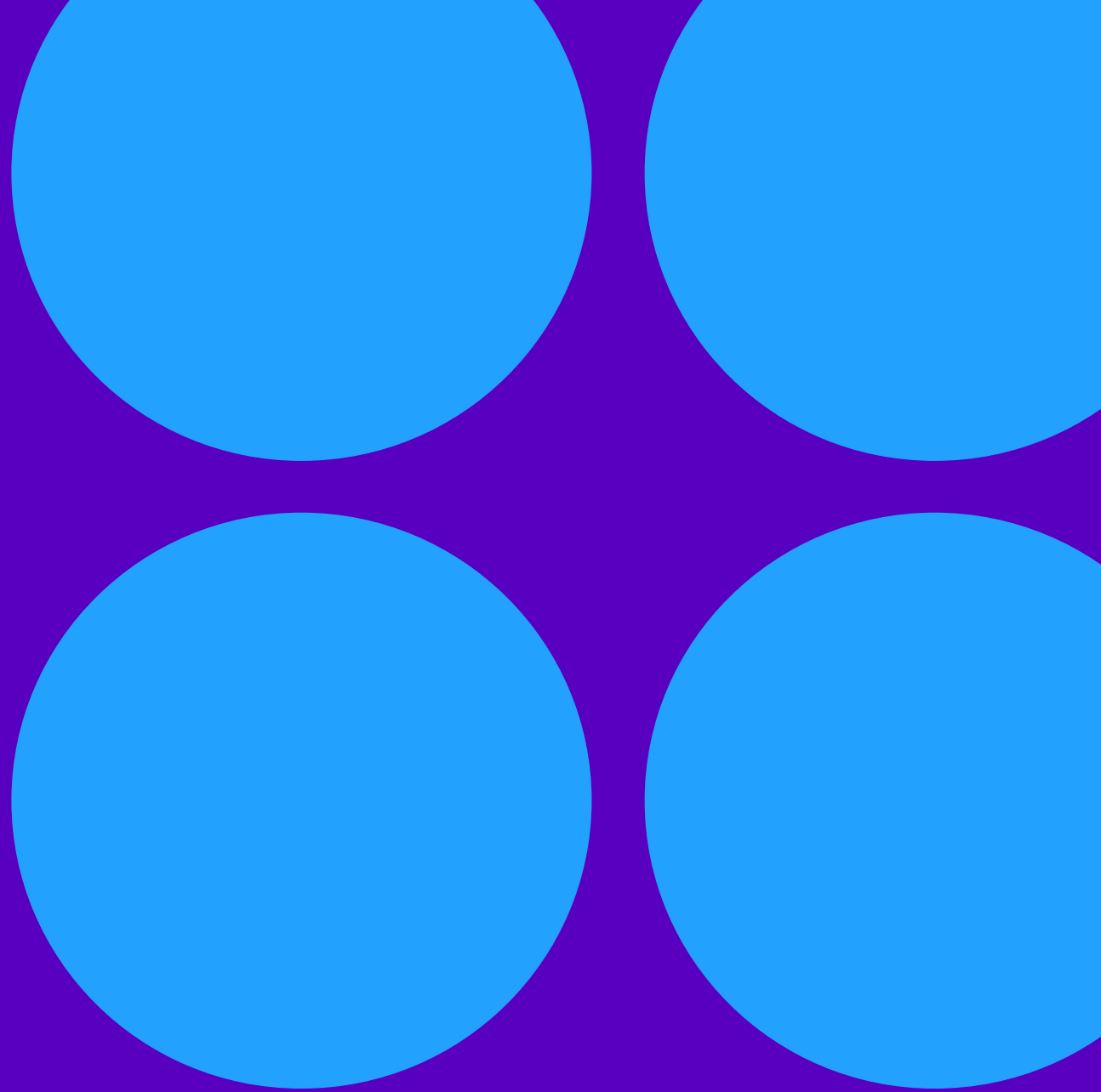
- ⌘ Apply a **reviewer lens** to your writing
- ⌘ Craft a concise, compelling **abstract**
- ⌘ Set realistic aims and strong **objectives**
- ⌘ Use **literature and data** to justify your case
- ⌘ Specify **methods** with the right level of detail
- ⌘ Plan **risks** and **dependencies** to improve feasibility
- ⌘ Demonstrate **Value for Money (VfM)** with clear budget logic
- ⌘ Keep language **simple, structured, and easy to read**

Agenda & Boundaries

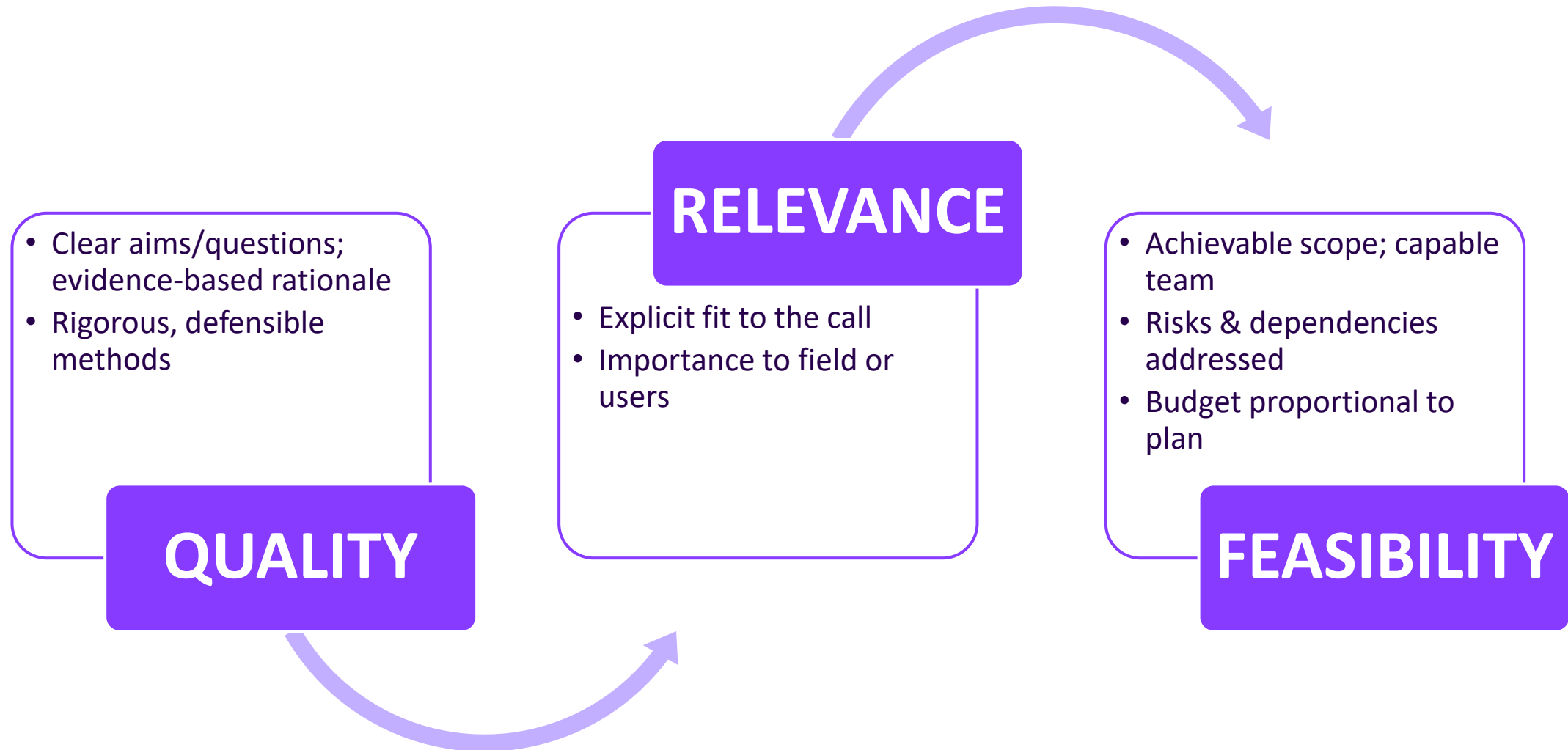
By the end of this session, you will be able to:

- ⌘ Reviewer expectations & how they read
- ⌘ Abstracts, aims/objectives, rationale
- ⌘ Methods, Work Plans, risks & dependencies
- ⌘ Value for Money & budget logic
- ⌘ 40-minute rewrite activity and debrief

Funders and Reviewers



What Funders Look For



Think Like an International Reviewer

Reviewers have limited time and no knowledge of your local context. Your proposal must make scoring easy, fast, and confident. How reviewers think:

⌘ “Can I understand this in 60 seconds?”

- Clear structure, simple English, strong headings.

⌘ “Is the problem obvious and important?”

- Spell out the context. Do not assume knowledge of Thailand, Lao PDR, or Cambodia.

⌘ “Is this team credible for this work?”

- Specific roles, expertise, and access build trust.

⌘ “Do aims, methods, timeline & budget align?”

- Reviewers look for internal logic. Any mismatch signals risk.

⌘ “Are risks and dependencies understood?”

- Zero risks = unrealistic. Realistic risks and mitigations = professionalism.

⌘ “Is this proposal easy to score?”

- Bullet points, short paragraphs, and clear signposting help reviewers stay on your side.

Warm-Up: Spot the Problem

“Business development and small entrepreneurship constitute a major part of the economy in developing countries within the South African Development Communities (SDGC) including Botswana. However, more than 80% of business enterprises are still failing (Adebayo, 2019; Bushe, 2019; Gumel & Bardai, 2023). Entrepreneurship tends to be fragmented and linear without integrating contextualised business transformation and sustainability (Kutlu & Ngoasong, 2023). The entrepreneurship in Botswana is yet to effectively deliver economic and community development especially among vulnerable women within marginalised communities. The creation of transformative and sustainable food production and food consumption entrepreneurship focusing on gender equality is yet to be fully explored (Erikson & Freidenvall, 2023). This feasibility research project will focus on sustainable development goals including gender equality, no poverty, zero hunger, employment generation and improved quality of life (Mmereki et al., 2023). The research will develop transformative sustainable food production and food consumption gender equality entrepreneurs in Botswana.”

⚡ Your task (2–3 minutes):

- Identify at least 3 problems from a reviewer’s perspective
- Sharing your finding with the group



‘A good abstract in a research bid acts as the "shopfront" that sells your proposal. A bad abstract and you have instantly lost the reviewer!’

Prof. Paul Langford

Imperial College – BBSRC and Meningitis UK Reviewer

Strong Abstract

This example is from a successful British Academy Writing Workshop application:

“This workshop series, titled, *‘Promoting Publication and Academic Writing towards Gender Equality in Academia for Sustainable Development in Thailand,’* led by the University of Derby, UK, and Srinakharinwirot University, **addresses persistent gender disparities in Thai academia. Beyond a conventional workshop, it aims to catalyse a transformative cultural shift,** recognizing the integral connection between gender equality, academic writing, and sustainable development. **For two years, the initiative guides participants** through identifying gender equality challenges in Thai academia, emphasizing stakeholder engagement ... **The overarching vision is to foster an academic ecosystem where gender inclusivity is foundational...**”

⌘ Problem clarity:

- “persistent gender disparities”. There is no guessing the reviewer needs to undertake.

⌘ Relevance:

- Links to academic writing & sustainable development

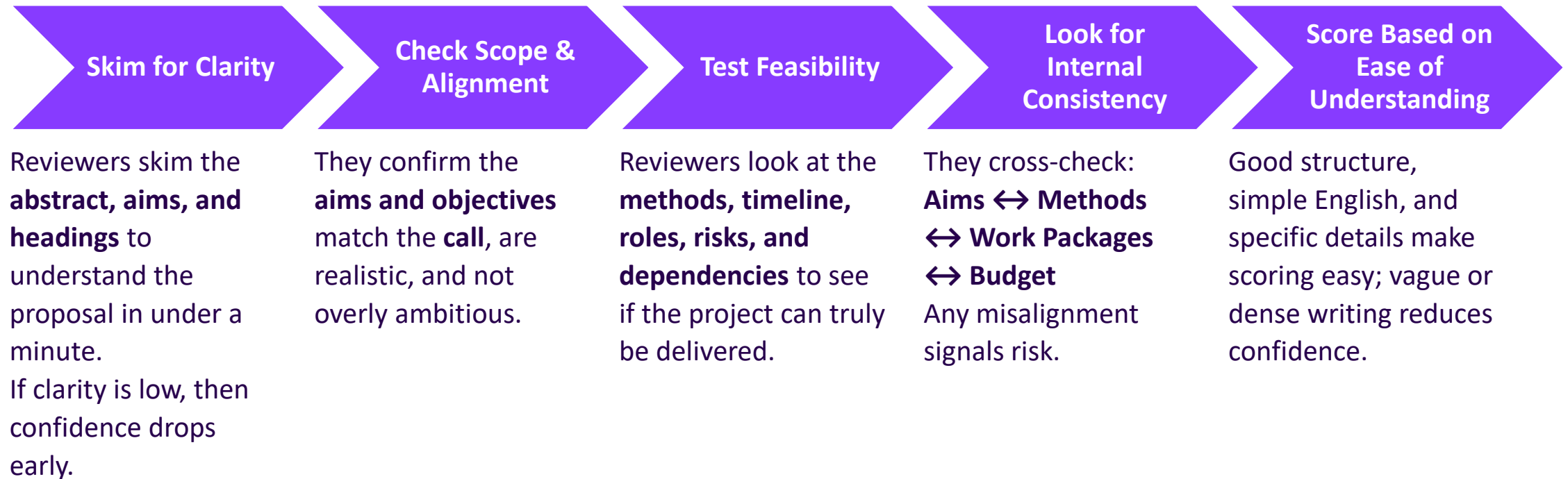
⌘ Feasibility:

- Briefly outlines a two-year, structured programme, not vague

⌘ Tone:

- confident, accessible English; easy to score

How Reviewer Actually Read



What Strong Proposals Typically Include

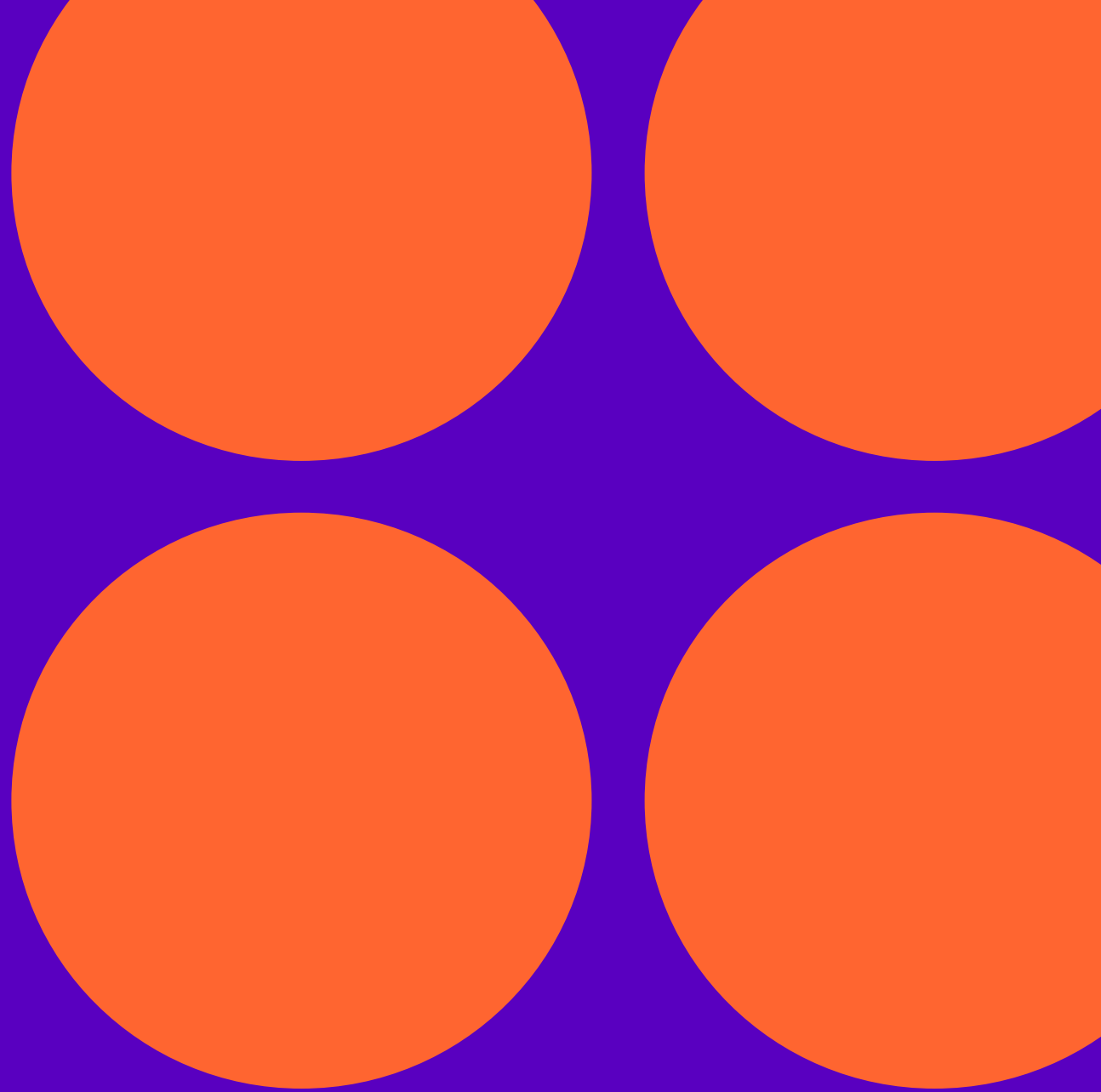
To identify what makes a proposal competitive, we reviewed two successful international applications:

- A **British Academy**-funded Thai academic writing programme, focusing on structured training and national relevance.
- An **Arts and Humanities Research Council** UK–Africa research networking grant, demonstrating strong objectives, rationale and planning.

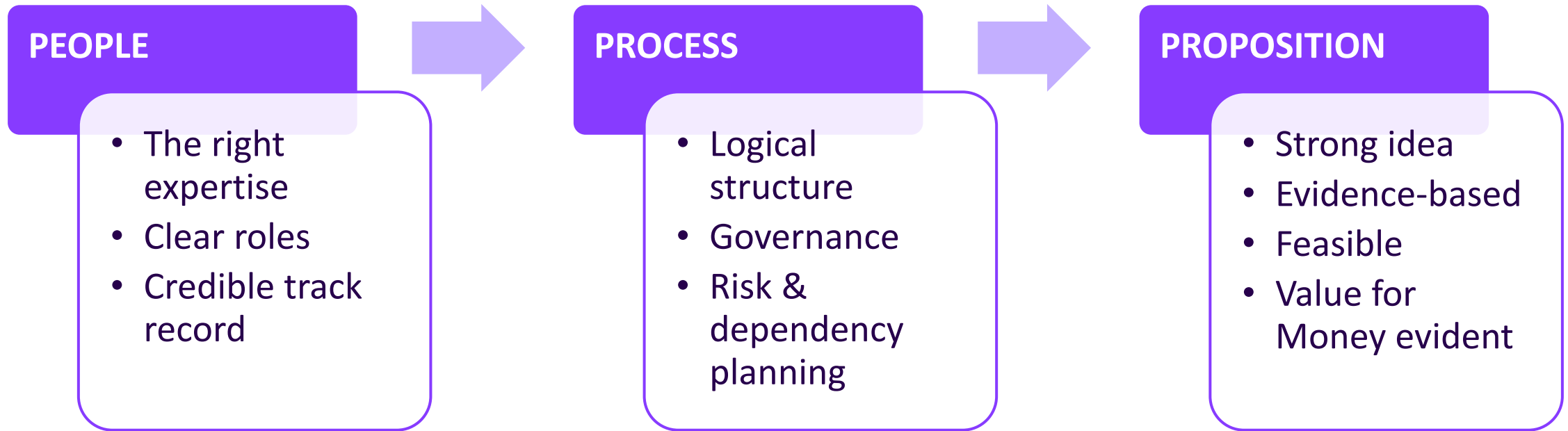
From these, strong proposals consistently show:

- ❖ **A clear, well-framed problem:** The challenge is stated simply, with enough context that any reviewer can understand why it matters.
- ❖ **Realistic, actionable objectives:** Concrete activities matched to the timeframe (e.g., workshops, sessions, specific outputs).
- ❖ **Evidence-based rationale:** A short, focused explanation of why this topic is important, grounded in data, literature, or policy.
- ❖ **Structured, feasible delivery plans:** A plan that shows how activities will happen (timeline, sessions, partners).
- ❖ **Clear, accessible writing:** Short sentences, strong verbs, logical flow. Making it easy for reviewers anywhere in the world to follow.

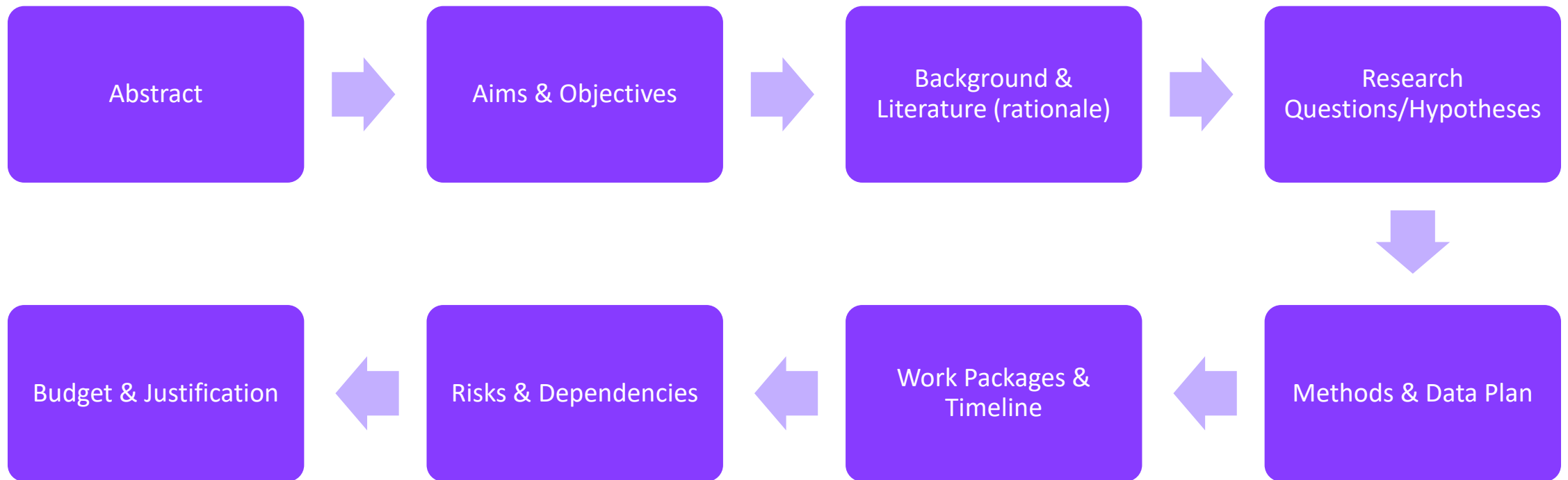
The Three Ps & Structure



The Three Ps of Bid Writing



Structure of a Strong Proposal



Strong Objective

This example is from a successful Arts and Humanities Research Council UK–Africa research networking grant:

“Objectives

1. **To foster world-class research and human rights scholarship**, promoting critical and decolonial engagement with social, environmental, and human rights issues in Africa.
2. **To stimulate debate and exchange ideas** across disciplines and sectors on good-fit approaches to implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs).
3. **To facilitate interactions between researchers and stakeholders** through a series of workshops, seminars, and networking activities across UK and African partner institutions.
4. **To develop strong academic links with Africa-based scholars**, strengthening international collaboration and supporting home-grown research capacity.
5. **To examine and highlight supply chain sectors** that pose risks of human rights violations, and provide tools to prevent or mitigate such impacts.
6. **To advance understanding of business and human rights policy frameworks** in Africa and explore how they can be strengthened through multi-stakeholder engagement.”

⌘ Action Verbs:

- “foster”, “stimulate”, “facilitate” and “develop”
- They show achievability

⌘ Sequence:

- Logical
- Each objective maps to an activity or deliverable

⌘ Feasibility:

- Not over broad

⌘ Specific

- Each objective points to a specific activity or contribution

Research Questions

Strong questions are:

- ❖ **Specific & answerable** with your data
- ❖ **Proportionate** to resources & timeframe
- ❖ **Context-aware** (language, access, geography)
- ❖ **Method-linked** (you can show how you will answer them)



Strong Rationale

This example is the Arts and Humanities Research Council UK–Africa research networking grant:

“Business enterprises and transnational corporate actors operate in a complex global environment, especially in high-risk sectors such as mining, oil and gas, telecommunications, construction, banking, and health care amongst others.

Understanding human rights responsibilities, impacts and socially responsible behaviour for companies is therefore an essential component of corporate risk management in our current world. In addition to minimising litigation, financial and reputational risks, understanding and demonstrating corporate respect for human rights is vital to building a culture of trust and integrity amongst local communities, investors, and shareholders.”

⌘ Context framing:

- Situates the issue in “complex global environments” and high-risk sectors — immediately shows relevance.

⌘ Identifies the core rationale:

- human rights responsibilities → corporate risk management.

⌘ Signals urgency:

- “essential component”, “our current world”.
- Persuasive framing without exaggeration.

⌘ Shows multiple beneficiaries

- local communities, investors, shareholders this widens relevance.

⌘ Accessible writing

- No jargon; flows logically; easy for multi-disciplinary reviewers to follow

Data: Strengthening Credibility

Add evidence signals early:

- ⌘ National/provincial statistics
- ⌘ Pilot findings or feasibility indicators
- ⌘ Prior studies or stakeholder consultations
- ⌘ Access letters (where appropriate)



Methods: Detail That Builds Trust

Study Design (What you will do)

- Clear design choice: quantitative, qualitative, or mixed
- Explain why this design fits your aims

Sampling (Who, where, how many)

- Specify numbers, groups, locations
- Show access is realistic (schools, clinics, villages, ministries)

Data Collection (How you will gather data)

- Tools: surveys, interviews, sensors, observations
- Steps: recruitment → data gathering → quality checks
- Mention translation/local adaptation if relevant

Analysis (How you will interpret data)

- Statistical tests, coding frameworks, triangulation
- Who analyses what, and with what tools

Governance (How you ensure rigour)

- Ethics approvals, data management, safeguarding
- Quality assurance and validation steps

Dependencies: *Make* Design & Delivery Realistic

Dependencies = what your project **relies on**.

⌘ **Delivery dependencies:** approvals, partner access, field logistics, procurement

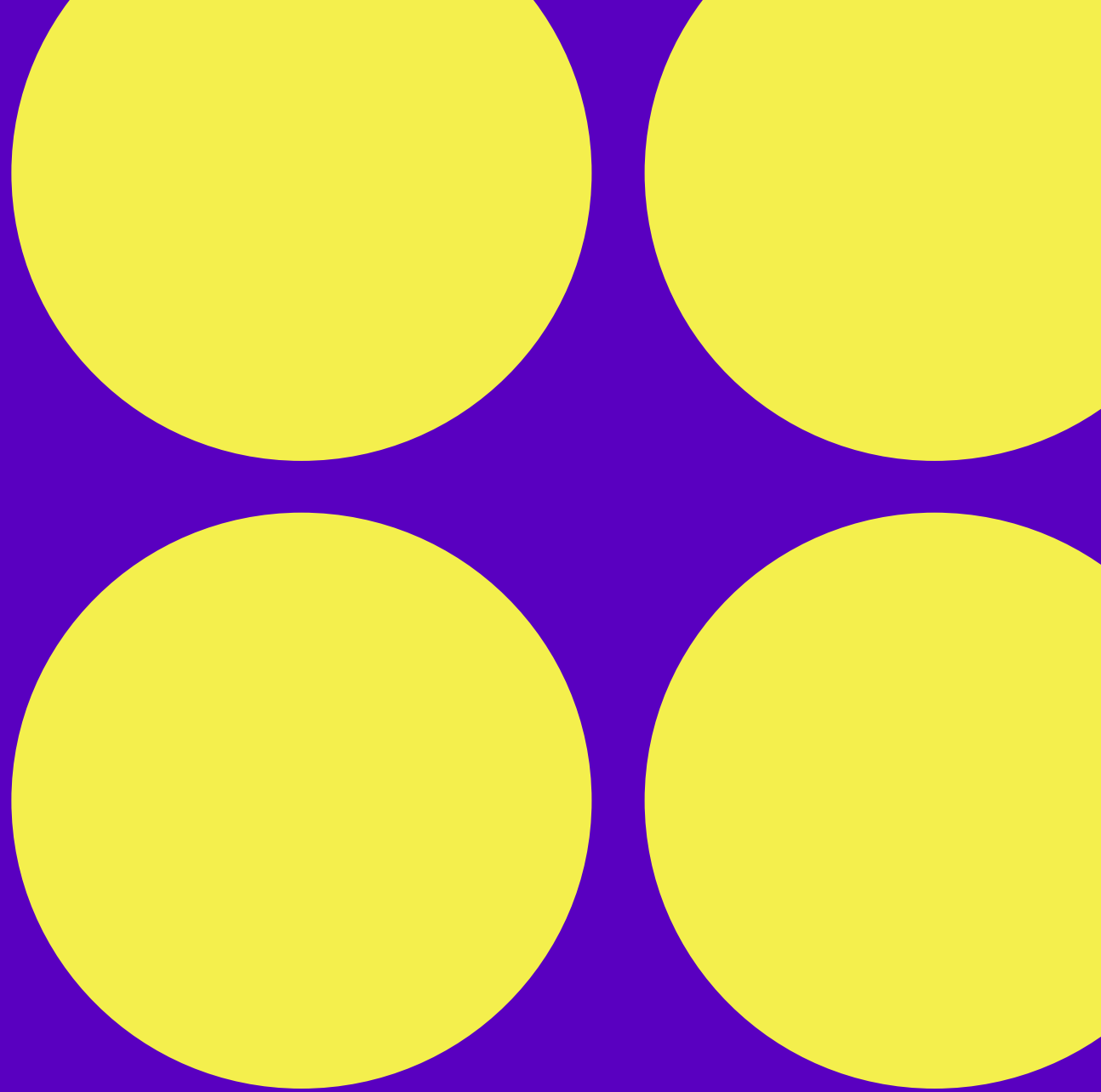
⌘ **Design dependencies:** avoid single-point-of-failure designs

- Can Work Packages run in **parallel**?
- Can analysis start with **partial data**?
- Are there **backup sites/partners/tools**?

Resilient design = higher reviewer confidence.

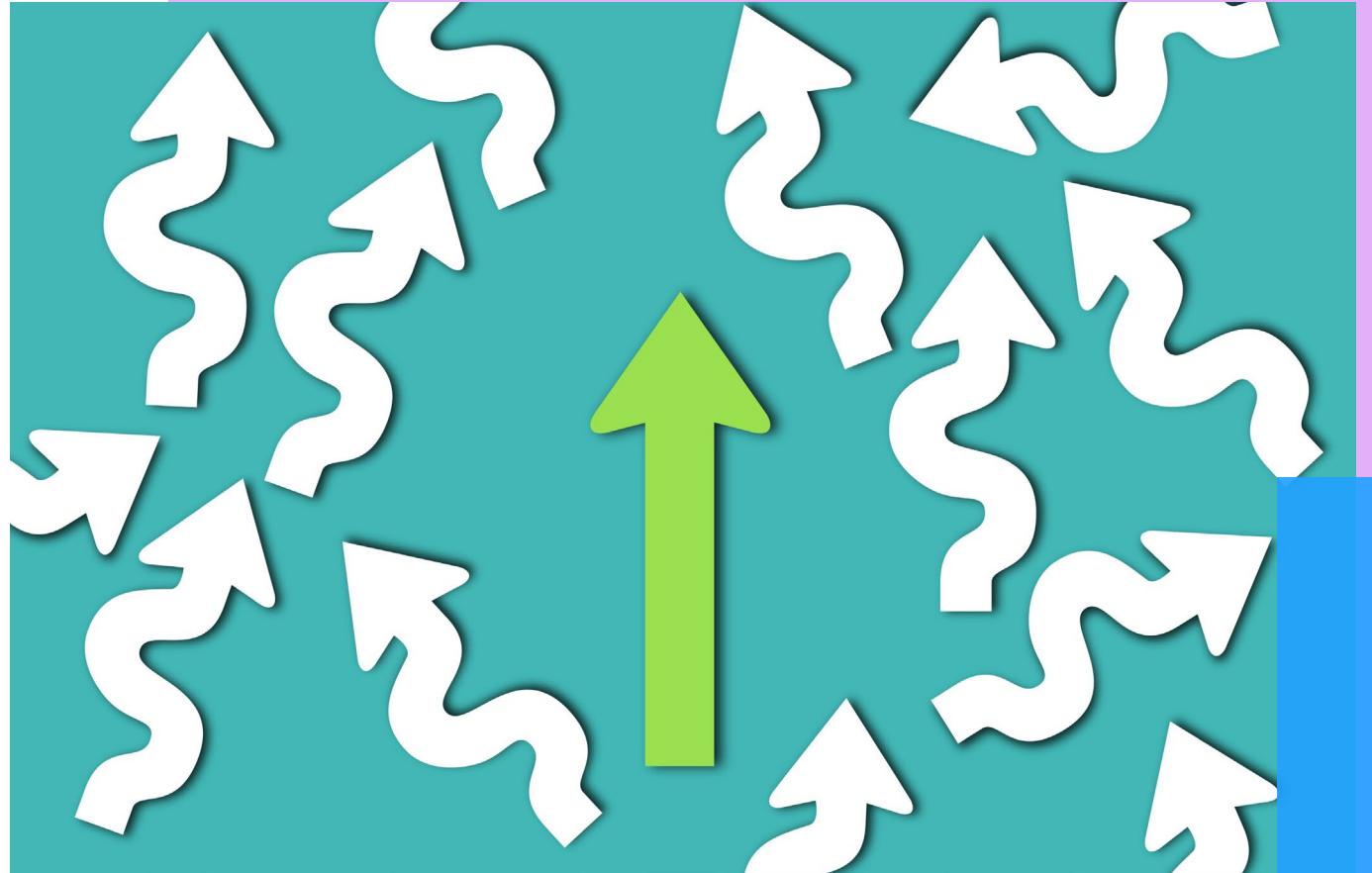


Persuasive Writing

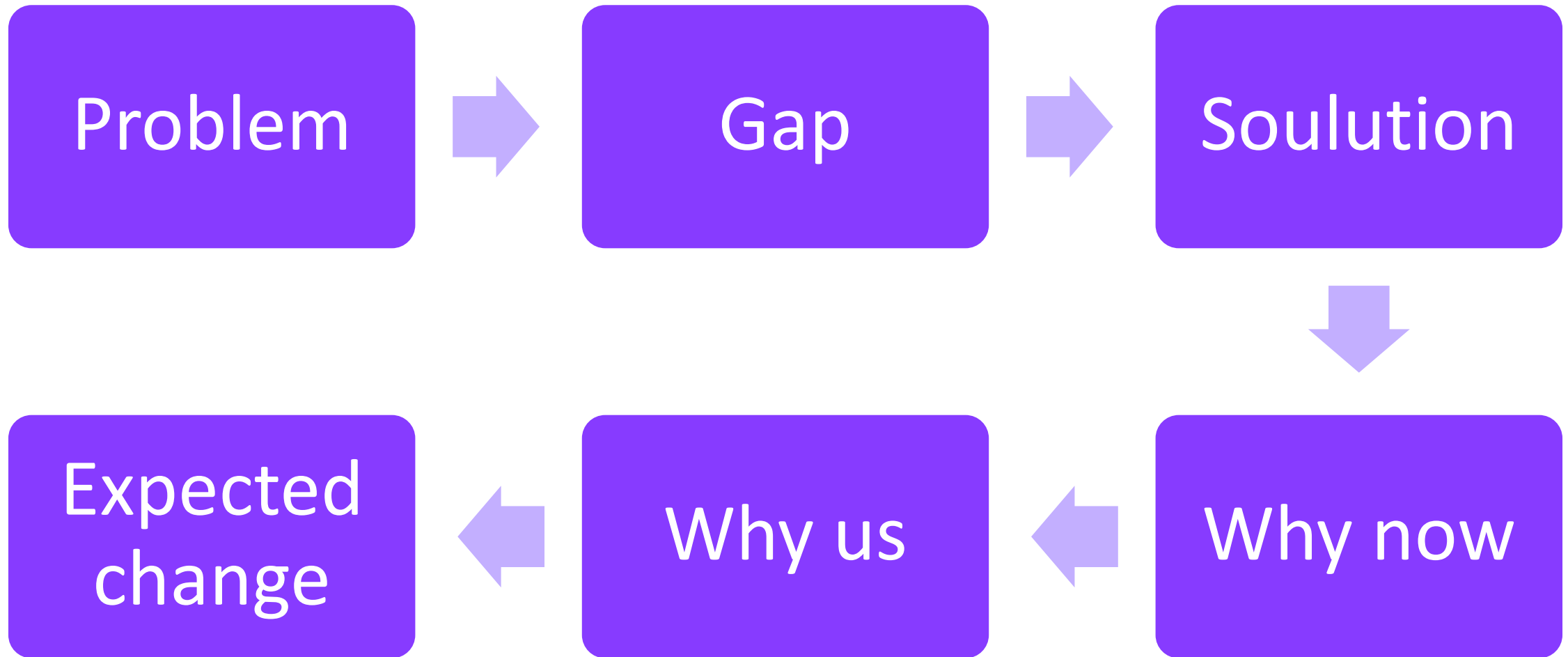


Make It Easy to Follow

- ❖ Mirror assessment criteria with headings
- ❖ Use bullets and short paragraphs
- ❖ Keep sentences clear (avoid jargon)
- ❖ Front-load the point of each paragraph
- ❖ Cross-reference: “See WP2 for analysis plan”



Writing a Compelling Research Narrative



Narrative Techniques That Work

- ❖ Active verbs (“deliver”, “evaluate”)
- ❖ Numbers where possible
- ❖ Define local terms/concepts
- ❖ Transitions: “First... Next... Therefore...”
- ❖ Avoid over-claiming



Coherence: Everything Must Align

A strong proposal reads as one connected argument, not separate sections. Reviewers check for alignment across the whole document.

⌘ Aims ↔ Objectives

- Your objectives must directly deliver your aims, not introduce new ideas.

⌘ Objectives ↔ Methods

- Methods must show exactly how each objective will be achieved.
- If an objective isn't covered by your method, reviewers notice.

⌘ Methods ↔ Work Packages

- Every methodological step should appear clearly in a Work Package task.
- No “mystery methods” that do not map onto activity plans.

⌘ Work Packages ↔ Timeline

- Tasks must be paced realistically.
- If timelines do not match Work Package complexity, feasibility scores drop.

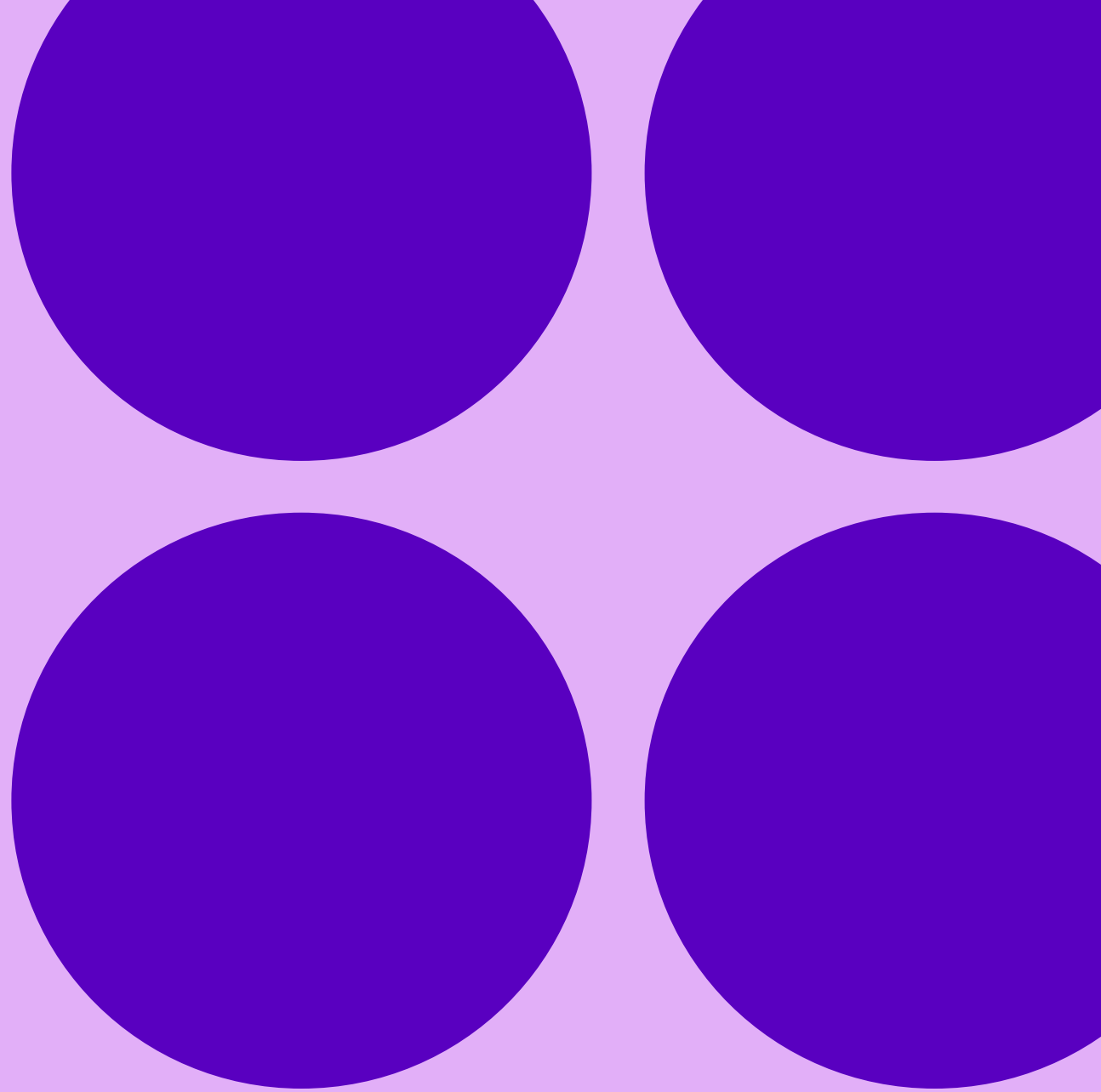
⌘ Activities ↔ Budget

- Every cost must “touch” a specific task.
- Budget lines without an activity create credibility gaps.

⌘ Design ↔ Risks & Dependencies

- Show how the project holds together if something slips:
- Parallel tasks, alternative sites, flexible sequencing.

Budgeting and Value for Money



Budgeting Essentials

⌘ Stay Within Scheme Rules

- You are **bound by the funder's eligibility restrictions** (e.g., what can/cannot be funded, caps on staff time, limits on travel, equipment rules).
- Follow the scheme's **format, categories, and justification** requirements exactly; do not deviate.

⌘ Cost What You Can *Actually* Deliver

- Staff time must reflect **real effort** (leadership, data collection, analysis, QA).
- Travel/workshops must be costed **sensibly** for local conditions.
- Equipment/consumables must be **necessary**, not aspirational.

⌘ Link Every Cost to a Task

- Every budget line should “touch” a **specific Work Package task**.
- If reviewers cannot see the link, they assume it is unnecessary.

⌘ Show Value for Money (VfM)

- Explain why each cost is **proportionate, efficient**, and adds value.
- Emphasise use of **local resources, partnership efficiencies**, and lean delivery.

⌘ Be Transparent and Precise

- No vague categories (“miscellaneous”).
- Use round-numbers sparingly; itemise where needed.
- Ensure the narrative matches the numbers.

Value for Money

A strong proposal shows how each cost contributes to delivery and why the budget is proportionate, efficient, and justified.

❖ Example of a Strong Justification

- *“**Accommodation (£9,650)**: Ensures comfortable stay for participants, facilitating engagement... Meals ensure energy and participation... **Travel costs** ensure participation from different regions.”*

❖ Why This Works (Reviewer Lens)

- **Purpose-driven**: each cost is linked to an activity or requirement
- **Proportionate**: amounts are reasonable for workshop delivery
- **Transparent**: no hidden or vague categories
- **Aligned**: all items map directly to the work programme

❖ What Reviewers Look For

- Costs are **essential**, not “nice to have”
- Expenditure matches **timeline**, **staff effort**, and **WP** tasks
- Clear demonstration that the project **maximises resources**

What “Realistic” Looks Like

- ⌘ Feasible sample sizes; achievable recruitment
- ⌘ Time for approvals & translations
- ⌘ Balanced workloads across Work Packages
- ⌘ Contingency via design resilience
- ⌘ Delivery signals (e.g., access letters; existing datasets)

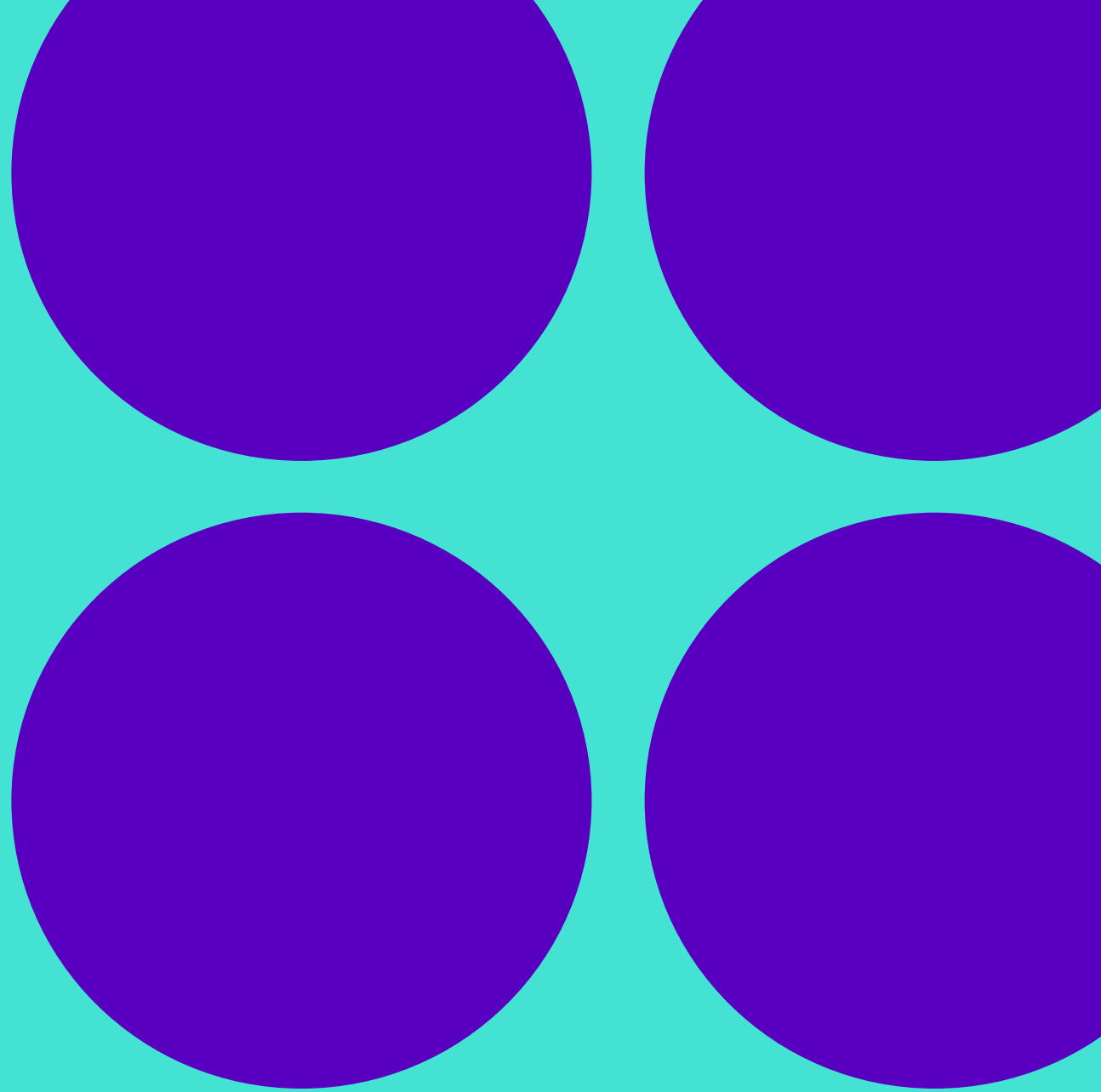


Why Proposals Fail (Common Pitfalls)

- ⌘ Vague aims/methods; weak rationale
- ⌘ No pilot/baseline data
- ⌘ Over-ambitious for time/money
- ⌘ Ignored risks/dependencies
- ⌘ Budget not aligned to tasks
- ⌘ Hard to read or follow



Activity: Re-
write an
abstract



Context of the 'Research Project'

This is supposed to be a research study exploring how rural women in a specific part of Southeast Asia (for example, northern Thailand, rural Lao PDR, or eastern Cambodia) can improve their livelihoods through small, sustainable enterprises. The abstract should include:

- ❖ the research problem,
- ❖ the aim or question,
- ❖ the location and population,
- ❖ the method,
- ❖ and the expected contribution.

But the paragraph below does not communicate that.

"We want to study ways to help rural women in Southeast Asia improve their livelihoods. We will work with partners and do activities in the community. This project will create opportunities for women and lead to better outcomes."

Why this is weak

- ❖ No specific country or location
- ❖ No research aim or question
- ❖ No research problem
- ❖ No method (design, sample, data, analysis)
- ❖ No evidence or background
- ❖ No expected research outputs
- ❖ Very general and unclear
- ❖ Reads like a project plan, not a research abstract



Rewrite this as a strong mini-abstract (30 minutes)

Your rewrite should include:

- ⌘ The research problem (what issue you are studying)
- ⌘ A specific location (e.g., one region, one district)
- ⌘ The research aim or question
- ⌘ The method (how you will collect and analyse data)
- ⌘ The population (who you study)
- ⌘ The expected contribution (why this research matters)
- ⌘ Short sentences
- ⌘ Simple vocabulary
- ⌘ Logical order



Full Task Details

⌘ Full task can be found here:

⌘ <https://tinyurl.com/BCModule1Task>



Key Takeaways & Q&A

- ⌘ Abstract sets the score
- ⌘ Objectives must be actionable & feasible
- ⌘ Rationale uses evidence, not claims
- ⌘ Methods need replicable detail
- ⌘ Risks & dependencies make design resilient
- ⌘ VfM is a narrative, not just numbers
- ⌘ Clarity wins. Help reviewers say “yes”
- ⌘ <https://tinyurl.com/BCModule1HO>



Thank You

