

Bid Alchemy Good Practice Guide



How to structure your responses

Increase the readability and evaluation score by deploying the right structure for each response.

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We spend a great deal of time to ensure that the subject matter of our responses is correct and compelling. However, we may not spend as much time considering the structure of each of these responses.

Using inconsistent or incorrect structures may result in you losing evaluation points and possibly making an error that disqualifies you from the bid.

Setting the structure, using these guidelines, prior to writing, is an easy way to increase your evaluation score and increase efficiencies in response writing.

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1. The Structure of your responses

Our proposals consist of multiple responses. These responses are generally answers to the questions and statements that a customer gives us, within their tender document. We call these requirements.

The quality and structure of each response drives either an evaluation score or qualification to bid.

Creating strong propositions means we can furnish the response with evidence that will drive high quality is a challenge. However, if we do not pay attention to the structure of our response then we risk losing evaluation points that we deserve and risk disqualification.

By applying the right structure to our responses, prior to beginning writing, we:

- ③ Develop responses that are compliant to the customer's requirements – removing the risk of disqualification.
- ③ Support our content owners by providing them with the skeleton for their response. Rather than starting with a blank sheet, they now have the structure subject areas to direct them.
- ③ Make it easier for the buyers to read our responses and clearly understand why our approach is the best way.

The easiest ways to reduce your evaluation score and thus the easiest ways to increase it.

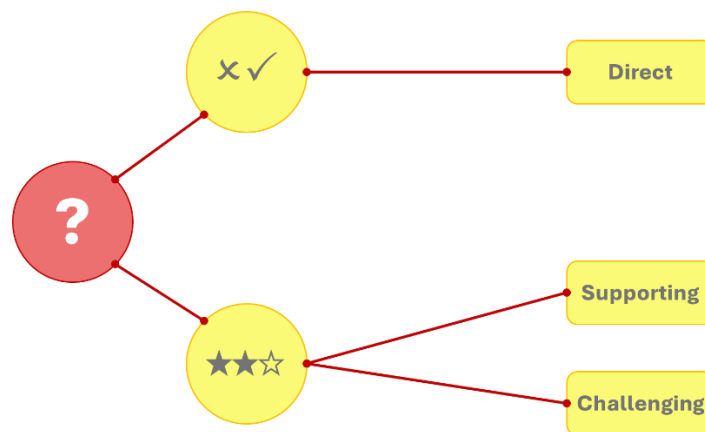
I suspect we have all submitted a proposal that was hard to pull together, but we felt it would achieve our objective (down select or win). After the customer has evaluated it, we find that we have not scored as well as expected and have failed our objective.

If you now review that proposal you may find that there are common mistakes, we make within the structure that has cost us the evaluation points we thought we would earn, and our proposition deserves.

By not considering the structure we generally lose evaluation points by:

1. Not having consistent, clear approaches to your responses, that makes it easy to read and digest.
2. Do not actually answer the requirement or all elements of the requirement.
3. Do you use the right approach to engage the buyers mind and enable them to be convinced that our approach is right.
4. Miss out on providing evidence that would enable the buyer to increase the evaluation score.

2. There are different types of requirements



The requirements that a customer sets us are either pass / fail questions or those where the quality of our response will determine the evaluation score.

There are two main types of requirements the customer may ask us. They are those that are mandatory requirements (often called Pass/Fail) and those that they will apply an evaluation score (Quality).

You can usually identify the type from the tender documents that will state that there is a pass/fail or an evaluation score associated to the requirement (or set of requirements).

2.1. Pass / Fail Requirements

These are generally requirements that require a direct positive response or the provision of evidence.

The customer is using these so that they can filter down the multiple proposals. They are aiming to reduce the work effort by removing proposals from organisations that they would be unconfident in contracting.

Often, the customer will collate the Pass / Fail requirements into a section of the tender documents and titled as “Compliance Requirements” or “General Requirements”. In some instances, they are throughout the tender documents and may include a statement to say “*you must meet this requirement to be compliant*”

The customer may also direct you to respond in a certain manner, such as including the words “Compliant” or “Non-Compliant” at the start of your response.

2.2. Quality Responses

These responses are those that gain an evaluation score and thus the quality of our response affects this. Even in this case, the customer may choose to disqualify our proposal, if we score too low an evaluation score for certain responses. This means that we may gain great evaluation scores for sections of our proposal but because we score poorly in one section, the customer still disqualifies us.

3. Responding to Pass/Fail Requirements

Our responses should be short, clear, and binary (Yes or No). You should include any additional evidence so that the customer can be confident that our binary statement is correct.

There is little value in supplying more details or information as we will not gain a higher evaluation score by doing so and make the job for the customer harder.

The general structure for the response is:

- ☰ A direct response to show compliance (Yes or No, for example)
- ☰ Precisely respond to the customer question. You can achieve this by reshaping their requirement statement

A structured response to a customer Pass / Fail requirement	
Requirement	Do you hold accreditation to ISO9001
Response	Yes. We hold accreditation to ISO9001. Our certification number is abc00100223232.

The only time you may wish to add more details is when the customer could view us as not meeting the requirement and we want to convince the customer.

A structured response to a customer Pass / Fail requirement with supporting information	
Requirement	Do you hold accreditation to ISO14001
Response	Yes. We hold accreditation to ISO14001 at a group level. Our certification number is FR00200234232. and are currently undertaking accreditation on a country by country basis.

4. Responding to Quality Requirements

Our aim, with quality requirements, is to gain the maximum evaluation score, higher than the competition. We achieve this through the structure of the response.

There are two overarching structures that we apply for quality requirements. These are Supportive and Challenging.

To identify which structure to use, for each quality requirement, you need to consider whether we our response supports the buyers' current thinking or whether we need to convince them that our 'alternative' approach is more appropriate.

From our knowledge of the customer (capture plan material) and from their statement within the tender documents, we can understand what good looks like for them.

Sometimes our proposition supports all the elements of their requirement. We can respond, using the supportive structure. Our response will develop to support all their aims and thinking and will drive the optimum evaluation score.

However, there may be elements of our proposition that mean that we will deliver in a different manner to what the customer expects. We do this because we believe it is a better way to achieve their goals.

If we respond within the supportive manner, we will not be able to promote the strengths of our approach. Effectively we will score badly because we have a better but different approach that would achieve or better the goals the customer has set.

We need to challenge the customer's current thinking and convince them that our approach is better. When we achieve this, not only do we score the evaluation points we deserve, but we also reduce those scored by our competition – we have now convinced the customer that there is a better way.

The challenging approach is extremely powerful structure, that you need to workshop hard to get right.

4.1. The Supportive Structure

The supportive structure enables us to ensure that we include all the components we need for a clear, compelling, and comprehensive response. It also helps us to respond to all responses in the same manner, giving us the 'One-Voice' that we need for our proposal.

We structure each response, using the following components

- Supportive and shared understanding of the requirement
- Our proposition
- How we apply it
- The benefits we will deliver through this approach
- Compelling and confidence

4.1.1. Supportive and shared understanding

We start each response by showing that we understand the reason that the customer is asking this requirement. This is a sentence or paragraph where we show our understanding of their pain points, giving thought leadership. The customer reads this and should have a mindset that we know the challenges that face or expect. This creates resonance and they feel our empathy.

The general mistake we make is just replaying their requirement back to them. What you need to do is consider:

- Why is the customer raising this requirement?
- Using your experience and acumen, what are the pain points that drive this requirement?
- What are the consequences of not resolving the pain-points?
- What evidence can we bring to convince the customer that our understanding is correct?

Example of understanding the requirement	
Requirement	Support services must be available to all users 24*7*365
Poor understanding	We understand that you require support services to be available to all your users, as and when they need it. You require the service to be 24*7*365 to all your users across the globe, operating to a single set of SLAs.
Good understanding	As a global organisation working on time critical projects for your clients, it is critical that all your users can access support services, when they need them, with the same SLAs and quality of service. Your users based around the world, often working independently and outside of your office locations. Often, they have time critical deliverables to your clients, where failure to resolve a service issue could impact your ability to deliver against your contractual requirements, affecting your financial performance and reputation. You require a 'follow the sun service approach' from a supplier who provides a consistent service from centres of excellence across the globe.

4.1.2. Our Proposition

The customer now trusts that we understand the pain points relating to this requirement and they should view us as thought leaders in the relevant subject. It is possible that our explanation of their pain-points increases their fears that not resolving it will cause significant issues for them.

Now we have the customer focusing on the pain points, we show them a way out of the problem. This is the relevant part of our service or solution.

This part of the response may be several paragraphs, depending on the complexity. We need to:

- ☰ Clearly explain the element of the solution or service
- ☰ Why we selected this element (why we did not select other possible ways of doing it, that the competitors may have)
- ☰ Why we are confident this approach is the right one for the customer

Where we have areas of discrimination, we need to make them clear to the customer and explain the value of them. By doing so, we can achieve a higher evaluation score than the competition.

Describing the solution or service element	
Requirement	Support services must be available to all users 24*7*365
Poor description	We propose to operate the service to a set of SLAs that are consistent on a 24*7*365 basis. Our service agents work from our locations in the UK, India, Thailand, and Costa Rica. This gives good coverage for your locations that are in UK, Europe, USA, and Asia.
Good description	We will deliver your 24*7*365 support services from our Centres of Excellence in UK, India, Thailand, and Costa Rica. These Centres all work to the same ITIL compliant methods and processes, using a single set of tools within ServiceNow and report into our support services leadership team. Effective they work as one team, across our four Centres of Excellence. You will have real-time access to all raised service issue, their status, history, and actions. All our agents receive the same training and development and often take the opportunity of transferring between our Centres of Excellence. As a result, we can also ensure that the agents your user communicates with are fluent in the language spoken (English, German, French, Spanish and Japanese – your selected 5 languages) and are culturally aware. This is an approach that delights users of global organisations, such as yourself, as it is not generally available from other suppliers. We base our support service to you on our standard approach, that is used by over 50 clients of which 12 have similar 24*7*365 requirement to yourself. The client satisfaction of these 12 clients scores an average of 92% (Excellent) due to our customer focussed approach.

4.1.3. How we apply it

This is an important part of our response. If it is weak, then the customer may be convinced that we understand their pain point and have the offering to resolve it, but they do not have confidence that we can make it work. When we repeat this across responses, we may find we lose a bid that we could have one.

Within this element, we need to show the customer the way we are going to take them from the pain-points of today to the desired state. It may require several paragraphs to do this, dependent on the complexity of the requirement.

Definition of how we will apply the solution or services	
Requirement	Support services must be available to all users 24*7*365
Poor definition	We will allocate the user call to the operational Centre of Excellence that is closest to them. Their call will be managed by this agent throughout until resolution or at the end of the agent's working day when it will be transferred to another Centre of Excellence. All actions and notes relating to the call are available to the agent through ServiceNow, ensuring that there is no need for your user to repeat information.
Good definition	When your user contacts our support services (whether by landline, mobile or through the on-line service), our system will identify their location. Our unique call management algorithm will route the call to the right Centre of Excellence. The algorithm decides this location, based on proximity of the user. If the call is placed outside of the extended workday for that location (8am to 8pm), the algorithm will select the next another location, ensuring that calls are managed with the same level of staffing and management access. This is signification as calls managed from a single location on a 24*7 basis, often are unable to manage with escalations, once the management team have completed their workday. No new calls are directed to a location that is within 2 hours of the end of their workday to reduce the number of calls that need transferring to a different location at the end of a workday. The algorithm will assign the call to an agent, ensuring that they are fluent in the user's language and ensuring they have capacity to manage the call in an effective manner. The agent will add the details of the call to the created ServiceNow ticket and select the right call of action. All calls of action are workflows within our ServiceNow environment, ensuring that it is managed by the correct service time. Where a user's call for service, is not resolved within the extended workday, it will be formally handed over to an agent working in the next appropriate location. Through our developed ServiceNow environment. the agent has full access to all the history of the call. We ensure our agents have time within in their workday so that they can discuss the details of the call before the handover is complete. Your user will not notice any reduction in our service to them; in fact they may not even be aware that the change has taken place. We measure user satisfaction for all calls and refine the allocation algorithm from this feedback.

4.1.4. The Benefits we will deliver

Now that the customer is confident that we can take them from their pain-points of today, to the desired environment, we need to ensure they understand that our approach is better than the competition. We do this by expressing benefits that we will deliver.

These benefits must be:

- ☰ Valued by the customer – for example, there is no benefit to the customer in delivering something early, if they do not want or need it earlier
- ☰ Be better than the benefits the competition may state
- ☰ Be rational – the customer must be able to see that what we do will deliver the benefits, they will not just take our word on it.

This element should have short, direct and rational statements of benefit. It is generally a paragraph including up to 5 benefits (usually 2-3).

Describing the benefit	
Requirement	Support services must be available to all users 24*7*365
Poor benefits	By selecting us, you will have a support service that operates 24*7*365 within your 5 selected languages. The service will perform consistently across the globe and at all hours. It is proven with other global organisations who rate our performance highly.
Good benefits	Beyond the provision of a consistently high performing support service, operating 24*7*365 across the globe, you will gain the following benefits, through our proven support service environment: • Delighted users, who value the efficient delivery of service through an agent, who is proficient in their language, conversant with their culture, motivated to resolve their issue • Reduction in calls, that will reduce the cost of service to you. We achieve this through our Continuous Service Improvement regime that identifies methods to reduce common reasons for calls and the time for resolution • Realtime and comprehensive access to call statuses, through our proven development to our award winning ServiceNow environment • Effective escalation, if required that operates consistently, with efficient access to Centre of Excellence leadership

4.1.5. Compelling and Confidence

By getting the previous components right, we can expect a high evaluation score. To gain confidence that this is as high as we can gain, we need to convince the customer that we know and can be trusted to deliver it.

We achieve this through case material and independent evidence of our performance (such as awards, application of standards and metrics of performance).

The case material is where we have supplied a similar service before. It should include:

- ☰ Description of the similarity (Size, market, pain points, global reach)
- ☰ Benefits delivered in that case (e.g., service calls reduced by 15% within 18 months)
- ☰ Possibly a quote

Compelling Nature	
Requirement	Support services must be available to all users 24*7*365
Not Compelling	We provide similar services operating 24*7*365 to more than 50 clients across the globe. This includes Acme Corporation, GlobalDigital and Cosmic Energy. With more than 50 customers, spread across the globe, you can rely on our service which operates to ITIL processes and has ISO9001 accreditation. Support services requirements can be raised at any time and from any location, either by phone or from our on-line system.
Compelling	TechServ consistently rate our support services as “impressive” within their independent annual survey. Our Global clients rely on our ability to provide a consistent high-performance service Acme Corporation have 27,000 users working across the globe. Our focus on continuous improvement and call reductions has resulted in a 20% reduction in calls and a service that consistently performs above SLAs. Global Digital value our call analysis, that has identified changes that have made to their IT Architecture and hardware assets that has reduce calls by 22% and increased the performance and reliability of their IT investments. Cosmic Energy’s CIO stated at a board meeting that “If we changed our support services partner, I fear a riot amongst our users”. This is due to the efficient and effective performance of our agents who “feel more like our employees that those from an IT company” All these organisations have all renewed contracts with us during the last 3 years.

4.1.6. Developing the supportive response

Using the Supportive structure, we create the five parts of our response. We now need to merge them together. When you do this, you may find that the words do not flow perfectly together and perhaps your response is longer than you want.

You also need to consider the graphical nature of your response. In the example response shown above, we have not included graphics. There is plenty of opportunities to do so, which will increase the readability, clarity, and compelling nature of the response by doing so. In this example, we could consider:

- A flow chart diagram to show how a call is raised and managed
- An example SLA dashboard that shows high performance
- A photo or graphical element that gives evidence to the independent rating of our service
- Certification logos for international standards accreditation
- Customer logos for the case material

4.2. The Challenging Response

When the customer develops their requirements, it is possible that they already have a mindset on the best way to resolve them. There may be instances when we want to propose a better way for the customer to achieve their business needs. We call this an 'Alternative Approach'.

When we wish to propose an alternative approach, we are making ourselves unique from the competition. This can be a great advantage. If the customer understands and values the alternative approach, we will gain a higher evaluation score to the competition and thus be in the position to win. However, if we do not challenge the customer's current mindset and get them to understand and value it, our response will score low.

It is critical that we get these responses right and to do so, we need to challenge the customer's mindset and teach them a better way to get the same (or better) results.

Using the template approach below, results in convincing and compelling responses when they are workshopped rather than you try and create the response alone.

Given the power of challenging your customer's current thinking, it is best to develop these responses through workshops. Our combined brain develops the element of the response, as shown below.

The Challenge Structure	
Warmer	This is the introduction to the conversation if you like the lesson plan. Like the supportive structure, we need to start by explaining our understanding of the related customer issues. This we base on research, customer knowledge and hard thinking. You want your warmer to include facts that derive from independent research, benchmark data or anecdotes. The facts must resonate with the customer – we do not want them to think this is just the view of us to aide them in selling their wares. The purpose is to build up credibility. We want the customer to warm to us and be open to accepting our acumen. To make the warmer resonate, review the lesson plan and ensure that it uses the customer's language.
The Reframe	This is where we start to challenge the customer's assumptions or perceptions. We need them to be open to evaluating the problem they have, from a different angle. The aim is to deliver insight gathered from our acumen, experience and industry knowledge. We are now starting to move into the teaching mode. We need to show the customer that our insight enables them to reframe their thinking around how to solve their problem. In reviewing you reframe, consider whether it will make the customer start to think that their current mind-set may not be the best for resolving their problem.
Rational Drowning	Now that you have the customer open to our acumen and believing that we may have a different and valuable approach to their problem, we need to push home the advantage. We need the customer to realise that our way is the only way. We want the customer to understand that doing nothing or putting the problem on a back burner is not an option. We do this by focusing on the economics. We need to show the customer, through our acumen and industry research that the success of their business is positively affected by resolving the problem our way.

The Challenge Structure	
Emotional Impact	This is where we ensure that we make this resonate with the individual rather than just the business. We make the response personal. We are selling to a group of people, not to an inorganic organisation. We aim to personalise the problem to them. We want the customer to think how the problem personally affects them if this procurement does not resolve them and how they personally benefit if it is. Get this right and the customer may emotionally 'hit rock bottom' – this raises the criticality for them to resolve it. To get to really resonate, we need to know the individual, what sort of person they are. This message is personal, and you need to write it in their language appealing to their values.
A New Way	Now that you have the customer realising that the problem is critical to their success, you need to bring them back into their comfort zone. This is where we start to propose our solution that links to the underlying causes of their problem. This is a strong sales message and is effectively an expansion of your value proposition or may form it.
Our Solution	Now we deliver the proposition which we developed at the start of this thinking. In reviewing this, you need to ensure that, the logic between the steps lead to this solution being the resolution to their problem
Benefits from our approach	Clearly restate the benefits of our approach
Evidence	Provide supporting evidence so the customer is fully confident that this alternative approach is proven and delivers the right results.

4.3. The challenge of nested questions and hidden questions

Often, we find, that within a customer requirement there may be multiple ‘questions’ that need a response. The issue is that, if we do not respond to all, we will lose evaluation points.

However, if we use the standard supportive or challenging structures, responding to each of these questions could create a very long, repetitive response that will risk losing evaluation points.

When you are using the supportive or challenging structures, you need to ensure that you tailor the structure to effective

4.3.1. Nested Requirements

The customer may ask a series of requirement together. There is often a lead requirement with a series of follow-on requirements around the same subject.

The Requirement has multiple questions.

Our employees are located across the world, working from our offices and remotely. Many of our employees are working on client deliverables that have tight deadlines. It is critical that support services work consistently to the high service levels we require available to all users 24*7*365 in any location and consistent across all locations and all time zones

The nested requirements

- | | |
|-----|--|
| Q1. | Our employees are located across the world, working from our offices and remotely. Many of our employees are working on client deliverables that have tight deadlines. It is critical that support services work consistently to the high service levels we require. |
| Q2. | Support services must be available to all users 24*7*365 |
| Q3. | Support services must be available to all users in any location |
| Q4. | SLAs must be consistent across all locations and all time zones |

In the example above, there is one headline requirement followed by three nested requirements. If we answered each of these using the full supportive structure, we risk creating a large proposal that is repetitive.

For the headline requirement (Q1) use the supportive structure. For the follow on (nested requirements):

- ☰ Use the approach for Pass/Fail Questions to ensure that we answer the requirement (compliant)
- ☰ Describe what and how we meet the requirement (short)
- ☰ Define the benefits from our approach (short)
- ☰ Make it compelling – examples of where we have done this before (as appropriate)

Example of a response for a nested requirement	
Requirement	Support services must be available to all users 24*7*365
Pass/Fail Approach	Yes. Support services will be available to all users 24*7*365
What and how we meet the requirement	We will deploy our proven approach to providing consistent high-level service to users based across the globe. A user will be able to raise a support service requirement at any time and from any location, by accessing the online ServiceNow portal or by telephone. In all cases our unique algorithm will direct the call to a service agent working from one of our Centres of Excellence. The agent is selected ensuring that they are proficient in the language and has the capacity to respond effectively.
Benefits from our approach	Our proven approach benefits you by: High user satisfaction as we respond to each call efficiently by an agent who is motivated to resolve the issue, converses proficiently in the user's preferred language and who has cultural awareness. Consistent delivery of service meeting or above the SLAs, no matter where or at what time the user enacts the call.
Evidence	The CIO of Cosmic Energy who have a similar need for a high level of service across the globe presented our 24*7*365 performance at a recent board meeting. <i>"If we changed our support services partner, I fear a riot amongst our users"</i>.