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Grant Writing with AI for Artists

Class Handbook

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Based on the Driving Lessons class of May 7, 2026

Quick reference for the workshop. Most points apply to any AI tool; where Claude-specific features are named, that's what was used in class.

How to think about AI

- **Treat AI as a smart, capable, eager, but inexperienced assistant.** It works hard and wants to please you, but doesn't know your work, voice, taste or standards. Your job: give it context, correct it, push back, and remember that the work and voice are yours.
- **The jagged frontier.** AI is uneven. It handles some hard tasks beautifully and fails at trivial ones (e.g. great at high level math but fails in counting words). Learn the shape of the frontier by using it for everything and noticing what works *for you*, and what doesn't.
- **Push back on it.** People who accept AI output as gospel see productivity drop, and produce bad grant write-ups. People who actively push back on it see productivity rise and produce clearer, better grants. Treat AI as something to think against, not defer to.
- **It reflects what you bring.** AI won't make a bad grant idea good or a good grant idea great. But it may help you get that idea on paper better, clearer and faster.
- **Better than the next available human.** AI doesn't have to be the best editor in existence, it only needs to be better than the next available human. On grant deadline night, the next available human is usually you, burned out and exhausted. AI reads fresh. Often that's enough.

Setting up your workspace

- **Use Projects** (if using Claude). A Project is a persistent workspace holding files, instructions, and chat history together. Every chat inside it starts knowing your uploaded files and previous chats. Projects are the single biggest workflow change Claude offers over basic chat.

- **One project per body of work.** Upload everything relevant: call for proposals, foundation statements of funding priorities, descriptions of their past grants (if public), transcript, CV, artist statements, past grants, work sample descriptions. More context = better drafts and less hallucination.
- **Write all your grants for a given body of work in one project:** this is what makes grant writing more efficient over time because each new grant builds on the previous ones.
- **Connect Google Drive.** Settings → Connectors. Not essential, but lets Claude read Google Docs directly without copying and pasting.
- **Use the most advanced model for grants.** Stronger models hold more context and connect more sources at once, which is what grants need. They use your limit faster, but the trade-off is worth it for grant work. Lighter models are fine for simple tasks.
- **Data sensitivity.** Don't upload personally or organizationally sensitive material. If your workplace has an AI policy (banks, healthcare, some nonprofits), follow it.

The method: interview to transcript to draft

When asked to write about their work, people often default to stiff professional jargon, art-speak and grant language. When they talk about their work in a friendly conversation, the language is often more fluid, specific, vivid, simple, and it's theirs.

- **Have a conversation about your project** with a friend on a video call, transcribed; then feed the conversation transcript to AI to draft from it. Ask your friend to dig into the project, to ask you hard questions. Imagine explaining your project to a family member who knows nothing about your field: if you can explain it to a grandmother or a partner without jargon, you can write a clear grant.
- **Why this works:** The transcript carries your spoken language, phrasing, stories, and life experience into the draft. That's what makes a grant stand out in a stack of generic AI-written applications on the grant officer's desk.

- **Other source language is useful too.** Old artist statements, past grant text, project notes, blog posts, anything with more information and your voice. But the interview is strongest, because speaking pulls out things writing won't.

Teaching Claude your voice (Preferences)

Generic-sounding drafts mean you haven't told Claude what you want, what you like, and what your voice is like. The fix lives in two places.

- **Personal Preferences.** Settings → General → Instructions for Claude. Long-term instructions that apply to every chat in every project. This is where you teach Claude who you are and how you like your writing.
- **In-chat instructions.** Apply only to the current conversation. Useful for one-off corrections ("rewrite this with minimal changes to avoid using the word 'shoot'" for photography).
- **If the same correction keeps coming up: move it to Preferences. One-time issue: handle in chat.**
- **Build it over time.** Every time Claude does something you don't like, add a line to Instructions for Claude that fixes that. After a few months you have a working set of instructions that shapes every draft.

Things worth telling Claude in Preferences:

- **Writing style** (direct vs. warm, terse vs. expansive).
- **Banned words and phrases** ("excited to announce," "thrilled," "amazing," "in today's world", "discourse").
- **Banned constructions** (sentences starting with "While..." or "By doing this...", m-dashes, negative framing like "what we do is not X but Y").
- **Formatting rules** (prose over bullets in drafts; presentation and one-pager structures).

- **How edits should be handled** ("never undo my changes; flag concerns instead of fixing silently").
- **How revisions should be delivered** ("show targeted edits, not full rewrites"; "give 2-4 numbered options for phrasing alternatives").
- **How uncertainty/missing information should be handled.** Tell Claude to flag missing information, not guess, and not write around gaps. With this instruction, it will, for example, flag inconsistencies between your project and the grant scope and prompts. Without it, it can fill gaps with plausible fiction.
- **Anything general Claude needs to know about you and your work** (role, organization, geography, professional field, organizational constraints).

The drafting workflow

- **Build a worksheet first.** Ask Claude to generate a worksheet (GDoc or Word document) from the call for proposals: every question verbatim, word and character limits, text boxes for responses. Saves an hour of formatting before you write a word.
- **One question at a time.** Ask Claude to draft each response separately.
- **Read each draft for accuracy and style.** Does it accurately describe my project? Does it sound/feel like me? Anything in there I don't like?
- **Iterate.** First drafts are just that, first drafts. Expect at least a handful of rounds per response. Your work shifts from writing to editing.
- **Don't trust Claude's word counts.** Always check.
- **Long description first, short description/summary second.** Draft the full project description, then ask Claude to compress it. The reverse never works as well.
- **Open project descriptions with one sentence that says:** What you're asking for (\$\$\$ figure) and what you're doing with that money. Program officers reading

hundreds of applications must know what you are doing within two sentences, otherwise you lose them.

- **Clarity above all.** The single most important quality in a grant. Clarity and specificity beat impressive-looking language. Don't try to sound smart; be understood.
- **Trust Claude's flags.** If you've set up Preferences to flag inconsistencies and gaps, take those flags seriously: Claude can detect nuances you will miss. They're showing you the gaps a reviewer would notice too.

Cross-checking the full application

- **Eliminate redundancies.** Upload the full worksheet document (or link the Google Doc) and ask Claude to flag where the same information appears across sections. Ask it to re-write, section by section, to introduce minimal changes to eliminate those redundancies while preserving the work you've done iterating the texts.
- **Fact-check.** Ask Claude to fact-check the application against your source materials and internet (transcript, CV, call for proposals, press, websites). It will catch errors and flag claims it can't verify.
- **Read it cold.** Ask Claude to read the application as if knowing nothing about you and the project, the way a grant officer would. After two weeks inside a grant, you can't see it clearly anymore.
- **Read budget prompts carefully.** "How will the grant funds be spent" is a different question from "how is the project budget structured." Easy to conflate under deadline. If you've told Claude in Preferences to flag mismatches between draft and prompt, it will help catch this.

Compounding work across grants

- **Second grant is faster, third faster still**, if you keep them in the same project. The Project accumulates work you've already done. A week of work on the first grant becomes a day on the second, a few hours on the third.
- **Different funders, same substance.** Different application questions and word limits force different framings, but the underlying material is already in the Project. Claude will re-frame the language.
- **Claude can't see across projects.** To pull material across multiple projects, prompt each Project to summarize itself, then collect the summaries into a new Project. The new Project sees your full history without any one Project knowing anything about the others.

Budget work

- **Interviews might not cover budgets.** People don't naturally talk through line items. Prompt Claude: "Ask me for any missing budget information." It will interview you line by line: what you need, where the money goes, what other funding is committed or pending, where in-kind comes from.
- **Complex reconciliation.** For multi-grant budgets, finding eligible match funding, F&A percentage (for nonprofits), covering a project that exceeds any single program or grant: upload other grant applications, organizational budgets, financial reports, and ask Claude to do the math. Hours of work for a person; minutes for Claude. More relevant for nonprofits than individual artists, but worth knowing.

Resources

- Recommended reading: [Co-Intelligence: Living and Working with AI by Ethan Mollick \(Portfolio, April 2024\)](#). Wharton professor; short and accessible. The "jagged frontier" idea, AI-as-co-worker framing, and the discipline of using it for everything come from his book.
- Driving Lessons Discord. Space for past and current participants to share resources. Contact Hannah to join.
- Next workshop. Managing money, led by Morgan Rigaud, this fall.
- Questions. Welcome by email: boris@wavepoolgallery.org

On using AI at all: the conversation

We ended the workshop with a conversation about whether this workshop should exist. Before it ran, I'd received emails and social media comments arguing that teaching AI is itself a problem, for the planet, for artists' livelihoods, for the integrity of creative work. I want to acknowledge the questions, because they're real.

Several concerns surfaced. One participant has been going to county council meetings to push back against a data center being built near her neighborhood, and named the lack of regulation as the live issue: AI is happening in her backyard whether or not they consent to it. Another talked about what unrestricted AI use is doing to young people's critical thinking, and described a friend who teaches college art and is starting to see the same generic imagery turn up in different students' work, because they're feeding the same prompts into the same tools. Another described her organization's internal struggle: artists on the team feel that using AI displaces artist labor and replaces craft with output, and leadership doesn't know how to have a conversation about this. Several participants raised the environmental cost. All concerns were specific, local, and held by people who are using or planning to use AI in their work.

What was mentioned mostly as an affirmative case was access. One of us described working as a coach with neurodivergent college students who'd dropped out because writing was the gate they couldn't get through; some went back to school when AI gave them a way to write a paper without it consuming their entire creative life. Another described AI as the support that lets a neurodivergent person organize their thinking and communicate it clearly. I myself think about Wave Pool, where AI lets a small nonprofit do the work of a web developer, assistant researcher, editor and a grant writer we couldn't otherwise hire, capacity we wouldn't have at all without it.

There's a lot of discussion about what can go wrong with AI. There's not enough discussion about what can go right, and "what can go right" includes giving new access and capacity to people and organizations who didn't have it before: community organizers, activists, small nonprofits, artists, people with disabilities. That capacity is very substantial. The concerns are also substantial. We should be able to operate with those tracks active in our minds at the same time, and don't have to resolve which weighs more to take both seriously.