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The Bid Survival Kit

The twelve phrases that quietly lose bids, the ten-point check to run before you press submit, a two-minute evidence test, and the AI do's and don'ts for anyone writing bids, tenders and grant applications.

For schools, charities and SMEs writing their own submissions.

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Twelve phrases that lose bids — and what to write instead

Assessors read hundreds of submissions. These phrases signal padding, and padded answers score low because they spend words without earning marks. Every replacement below forces a claim you can evidence.

□ "We are passionate about..."	State what you did, when, and what changed. Passion isn't scoreable; outcomes are.
□ "We pride ourselves on quality"	Name the standard, the measure, and your last result against it.
□ "Our unique approach..."	If it's genuinely different, describe the mechanism. If you can't, cut 'unique'.
□ "We have extensive experience"	Give the number: years, contracts delivered, users served, value managed.
□ "We will endeavour to..."	Commit or don't. 'We will deliver X by Y' scores; 'endeavour' reads as a hedge.
□ "A wide range of services"	List the three that matter to this specification. Ranges dilute relevance.
□ "We understand your requirements"	Prove it: reference the specification clause and answer it directly.
□ "World-class / best-in-class"	Banned unless a named third party said it. Quote them instead.
□ "Going forward..."	Delete. It adds nothing and flags filler to a tired assessor.
□ "Our dedicated team"	Name roles, qualifications and who does what on this contract.
□ "We are committed to continuous improvement"	Give one example: what you changed, why, and the measured result.
□ "Value for money"	Show the calculation. Cost against outcome, ideally against an alternative.

The ten-point pre-submission check

Run this in order, the day before the deadline — not the hour before. Each point is a real reason bids get marked down or ruled non-compliant.

- 01** Answer the question asked — Re-read each question, then your answer. Does the first sentence answer it directly? Assessors mark against the question, not your narrative.

- 02** Match the evaluation criteria — If the marking scheme is published, mirror its language and weightings. High-weight questions deserve your strongest evidence.

- 03** Word and page limits — Over-limit content is routinely ignored or penalised. Check every answer, including appendices rules.

- 04** Mandatory requirements — List every 'must', 'shall' and pass/fail item. One missed mandatory can void the whole submission.

- 05** Evidence for every claim — Each claim needs a number, a named example, or a verifiable reference. Unevidenced claims score as assertions.

- 06** Consistency of numbers — Figures quoted in the narrative must match the pricing schedule and any appendices. Discrepancies destroy credibility.

- 07** Named people and roles — Does the delivery team named actually exist and have capacity? Assessors increasingly check.

- 08** Attachments and formats — Right file types, naming conventions, signatures, dates. Portals reject silently more often than you'd think.

- 09** Plain English pass — Read the weakest answer aloud. Sentences over 25 words get split. Jargon gets translated or cut.

- 10** Fresh eyes — Someone who didn't write it reads it against the specification. They will find what you can no longer see.

PART THREE

The two-minute evidence-gap test

Take your three highest-weighted answers. For each claim in them, ask the three questions below. Any claim that fails all three is an assertion, and assertions score in the bottom band.

1. Can I put a number on it? A quantity, a percentage, a date, a value. 'We reduced processing time by 40% over six months' beats a paragraph of adjectives.
2. Can I name it? A client, a contract, a project, a person, a standard. Named examples can be believed; anonymous ones read as invented.
3. Could they check it? A reference, a published report, an inspection outcome, an accreditation. Verifiable beats plausible.

If an important claim fails the test, you have two honest options: find the evidence, or downgrade the claim to what you can prove. Never leave the gap — assessors are trained to spot it.

PART FOUR

AI in bid writing: do's and don'ts

AI is now everywhere in bid production, and buyers know it. Some tenders now ask you to declare it. Used well it speeds up structure and drafting; used badly it produces generic, unevidenced answers that assessors spot in seconds.

DO	Use AI to structure answers against the marking criteria, tighten drafts, and check answers against the question.
DO	Feed it the specification and your real evidence, then edit hard. The facts must come from you.
DO	Keep a record of where AI was used, in case the buyer asks you to declare it.
DON'T	Paste in confidential client data, personal data or commercially sensitive pricing without checking the tool's data terms.
DON'T	Let it invent statistics, case studies or accreditations. Fabricated evidence in a public tender can be treated as misrepresentation.
DON'T	Submit unedited AI text. Generic phrasing is exactly what Part One of this kit tells you to cut.

WHEN THE DEADLINE IS ALREADY ON TOP OF YOU

Send it to the desk

If the submission is due this week and you already know it isn't strong enough, the checklist alone won't save it. We take the document you have and return a stronger, clearer, better-evidenced draft in 72 hours. You stay the author — we do the structure and the heavy lifting.

Rapid Check — £295 fixed. Your near-final submission reviewed against the specification, with direct written feedback on where it will lose marks and exactly what to change.

Sprint Pro — £1,500 fixed. The full 72-hour rebuild of an urgent bid, tender, grant or report.

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