

Spreading Roots Presents:



Writing a Minigrant Proposal: The Story of How Not Wanting to Do Work Actually Made Me Do More Work

Olivia Brown

In her article, Brown discusses her minigrant proposal writing process. Her process includes forgetting to do her work, frustration, and sarcastic comments. Brown offers a look into her eighth-grade classroom in her article, and explains how she wrote a “successful” minigrant proposal.

I walked through the doors of my 9th period English Language Arts (ELA) class ready to learn. I loved school, I was excited to research a new genre, then write it. *Actually, no.*

When I walked into ELA on a Thursday, I was tired, and I was complaining about science—my least favorite class. I was not at all ready to write another genre; I was actually dreading it. When Mrs. Kieffer (my teacher) announced we would be writing minigrant proposals, I had no idea what she was talking about. But I did know that it meant I would have to do more of this awful thing called research since we are supposed to be “writing researchers.”

Writing researchers look up anything they don’t know, and I don’t mean a quick Google search. A **writing researcher** thoroughly researches any genre they do not know how to write. You could say writing researchers are pretty self-sufficient, but they also ask for help if they need it, and they ask anyone they know about the genre they are looking to write.

Being the actress I am, I have been able to pull off this “writing research” character, even though research is my least favorite thing in the world (besides science, Johnny Depp, and tomatoes). So, I pushed through my sleepy haze and turned on my computer. Mrs. Kieffer explained to us that when you write a minigrant proposal, you are requesting money for a project, and in this case, a writing project. She told us we would all be writing a minigrant proposal, and we would actually be competing for the money.

All I was thinking was, *Oh great, more work. Another project, wonderful.*

Mrs. Kieffer also told us that since we were writing a proposal, we would need an idea to propose. She told us to have that idea by Monday. In class, we started to fill in what we could of the minigrant application (our names, teacher, etc.), until it was time to go home. I was overjoyed for the weekend ahead, and as usual, I forgot that I had any homework at all. When I came to class on Monday, Mrs. Kieffer asked for our minigrant ideas. I started freaking out, I hadn’t thought about the minigrant since ELA on Friday.

(*Okay, I thought to myself. Ideas, ideas, ideas.*) Of course, my table partner was always prepared and already had his idea all figured out; he always has his life together. Mrs. Kieffer drew closer to my table as I struggled to think of an idea, then she appeared next to me.

“Do you have an idea, Olivia?” She asked me. *No, I totally forgot about this whole project,* I thought, but you can’t say that to your teacher so I said: “Well,” I glanced at the bookshelf. “Maybe, uh, we could write a book with all our favorite words in it.” (Whew, I was saved.) “And what does that have to do with CHAT?” Mrs. Kieffer questioned. *Awwwwe, no.* I did NOT know that this had to be an actual, real, good idea, relating to CHAT. “Uh, I don’t know,” I said. It was the best answer I could come up with. “Keep thinking,” she said. Then she started to talk to my table partner, who of course, was prepared and had a good idea.

As Mrs. Kieffer moved to the other tables, I thought about what my *real* idea should be. What do I like to do? If my idea got funded, what would I want to spend all my time on? And how could I incorporate CHAT into whatever I was going to propose?

Mrs. Kieffer announced that it was time to go, and I spent the rest of the day pondering the idea that I didn’t have.

I came into class on Tuesday feeling confident, still not happy to be at school, but confident. My idea came from out of the blue when I wasn’t even

thinking about it. I knew what I was going to do. Class started, everyone opened up their Chromebooks and headed to Google Classroom. There, we found our class, clicked on the assignment that said, “Final draft of the minigrant proposal” and started to work. Mrs. Kieffer brought her red stool over to my desk. “Do you have an idea, Olivia?” she asked. “Yes, I actually do, for once.” I answered, nodding my head. “I want to write a children’s book to teach kids about CHAT.” “I think that that is a great idea; it would be highly fundable,” she said. “Thank you,” I said, as she dragged her stool along to the next person.

“Well ya sure got out of that one,” my table partner said. “Shut up,” I said, “That was my real idea.” “Honestly, it is a pretty good idea. I think you’re gonna get it funded,” he told me. “Well, thank you, but I honestly hope I don’t. So much more work,” I groaned. I turned to my computer, and opened up the minigrant application form (Figure 1).

Okay, I thought to myself. Start at the beginning: title. I typed in “CHAT for kids” in the blank space for the project title. That sounds good, I thought. “CHAT for kids,” I said quietly. Okay, got that down. What’s next? Project description, okay. 100 words or less, not okay. I started to worry when I saw the 100 words or less. I am not a “short story” writer. I can’t just write 100 words, when I have so many thoughts and ideas. This description is going to take a lot of revision. I started my description with “Kids learn in multiple ways through apps, teachers, and books” (Brown Minigrant Application 2). Okay, sounds good. How many words is that?

Application Cover Sheet	
Project Title:	
Applicants:	
Course and section:	ELA4
Instructor:	Deb Riggert-Kieffer
Project Director or Co-Directors:	Olivia Brown
Name:	Olivia K. Brown
E-mail:	obrown@d52schools.com
Project Budget:	
Project Description:	100 words or less
Itemized Budget:	promotion, materials, supplies, etc.

Figure 1: The work I did before I had my idea.

I highlighted my opening sentence and did a simple control, shift, C, word count. *Ten words, I'm doing good.* I started to type out more of my description, and let me tell you, once I start writing, I don't stop until I have to. I finished my first draft of the project description:

Kids learn in multiple ways, through apps, teachers, and books. My idea is that we can write a picture book about writing; we could teach kids all about CHAT. We would have to make it kid friendly because CHAT would be a hard concept for a second grader to grasp. This project will take a lot of creativity and materials. (Brown Minigrant Application 2)

I read through my description and decided it sounded good. *But how many words?* I thought. I did the very, very familiar word count procedure. *65, not bad. Means I have room to add things in and take things out if I need to.* Mrs. Kieffer announced that we needed to have our cover sheet done by Thursday, revisions and all. It needed to be ready to propose. All I had to do now was finish my budget and revise my description.

Okay, let's see . . . I have musical practice after school but nothing besides homework after that, and this is my last class, and I don't have THAT much homework. Soooo, I could probably do my budget tonight and work on my revising in class tomorrow, where people can help me.

My thought process went from homework to Dylan O' Brien in a matter of seconds. But, I'm not going to include that in my article because I'm sure you—the reader—won't want to hear me go on and on about adorable actors (even though I could). I shut down my Chromebook and put my papers away in my folder and headed out of class, and of course I forgot all about homework.

“Olivia, do you have any homework?” my mom asked, interrupting my Instagram scroll. “Uh, maybe, I don't know” I answered, paying more attention to a picture of a giant pizza. “How do you not know? Why don't you check?” she advised me. I put down my phone and started to rack through my brain. I usually remember homework by going through the order of my schedule.

Okay, math? No. PE? Ugh, I hate PE, but I have no homework. Media? We never have homework in media. Band? No, but I probably should practice. Chorus? I should probably practice that too. Science? Ew, yes, I have science homework. But do I have to do it? I probably should. ELA? Oh! My budget, I should probably do that.

I got out my science homework and got it done as quickly as possible, not really doing it for real at all. Then I opened up my Chromebook and

signed in. “Okay,” I said aloud. (I talk to myself a lot, it’s not weird.) “Let’s see, cover sheet.” My clicker hovered over my cover sheet doc; I clicked on it. “And budget. What do I need to pay for?” *Book publisher, obviously*, I thought. “Okay, I’ll look that up.” I said to myself. I opened a new tab and stared at the colorful Google logo. “What was I going to look up?” (I forget things easily.) “Oh, book publisher, right.” I typed “book publisher” in the search bar.

I started to scroll through the lists of websites until I saw one titled Studenttreasures Publishing. It said, “Our free student publishing programs have helped over 6 million students publish a book. Publish your students today with our FREE K–6 Student Book . . . Parents - Teachers - Create A Book Online” (*Studenttreasures.com*). *Oh, it’s free. I would have money to spend but I’ll look into it.* I started to scroll again, and another website caught my eye. This one was called Classroom Authors. I clicked on the link and it took me to the home page that said, “Receive a free book for your class library when you publish with 10 or more student authors. See how easy it can be to publish in your classroom” (*ClassroomAuthors.com*).

Receive a free book when you publish ten or more? I don’t think we will need that many. But maybe that’s just a one-time special or something. I decided it might be useful in the future, so I bookmarked it. I went back to the Google search and bookmarked *Studenttreasures.com* too. I continued to scroll, then I saw Schoolmate Publishing. *That’s probably not too bad.* I clicked on it, the words “Fast & Easy Student Publishing!” lit up the screen (*SchoolmatePublishing.com*). “Well, isn’t that perky?” I said to my computer while rolling my eyes. I hovered over the “Classroom Books” bar and clicked on the pricing option. A little girl with a big smile on her face popped up, and the speech bubble above her read: “Classroom Books are only \$19.95¹ each” (*SchoolmatePublishing.com* Figure 2).



Figure 2: A small child is overly excited about the price of books (*SchoolmatePublishing.com*).

Why is this website so happy? “This is not going to work for me,” I said, answering the question in my head. I bookmarked it anyway. “It looks like

¹ When I first did my research, the price was \$14.95.

book publishers range from like zero to fifteen dollars,” I said, biting my lip. I clicked back to my cover sheet. I typed “Book publisher and shipping \$0.00 – \$14.95” in the designated space for budget. “What else would we need to pay for?” I asked myself. *Well, children’s books have pictures, and we have a few artists in our class so . . . maybe new art supplies?* “Yeah, new art supplies, sounds legit.” I told myself.

I typed in “*Target.com*” in the Google search bar, and got a wonderful message from my network administrator telling me my access was denied (Figure 3). *What?! Access denied?! Ugh, school Chromebooks.*

“Okay, well, let’s see. Walmart?” I typed in “*Walmart.com*,” and what a surprise . . . access denied! *Michaels has a bunch of art stuff, it’s just pretty expensive, which is good because I want to make this look as expensive as possible.* This time I was braced and ready to be denied again, but when I typed in “*Michaels.com*” it actually took me to *Michaels.com*. “Finally, it’s about time,” I told my computer. I scrolled through the millions of brands of colored pencils, markers, and crayons until I found some I thought would be useful. I typed up my request for art supplies and then proceeded to do some simple addition.

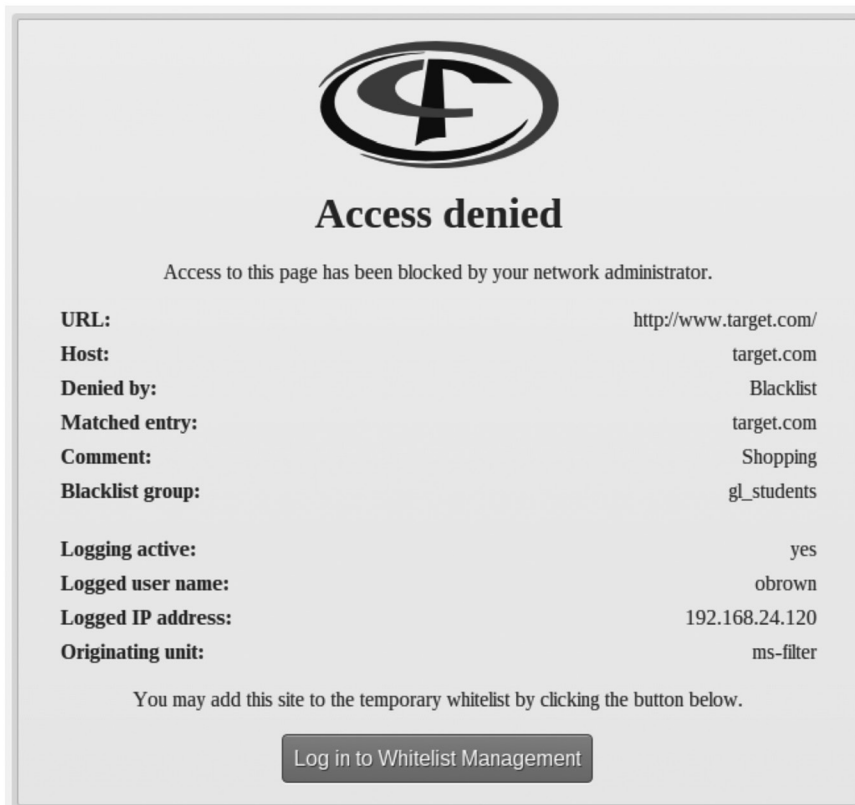


Figure 3: The school loves to control my life.

“Okay, everything combined adds up to \$37.95. I’ll ask for \$50, just in case anything goes wrong or we end up changing something” I said. *That looks good, looks like I’m done. Yes!* I shut down my Chromebook and put it away. “Goodbye schoolwork,” I said.

Thursday was another Science day, which meant I was not happy when I came into ELA. I slammed my folder on my desk and slumped down in my chair. *Ugh, school.* I rolled my eyes. “Today you need to have your partner read your description. You need to comment on your partner’s description and help them revise it,” Mrs. Kieffer explained to us. *Okay, this should be easy,* I thought. I got out my Chromebook and found my partner’s description. His idea was to use the money to research literature around the world. It was a good idea really. “This is good,” I said. “I like it, I would definitely do this project.” Traveling is one of my interests.

My partner didn’t answer until he finished reading my description. “Yours is getting funded,” he said as soon as he finished. “Uh, I don’t think so” I said. “Uh, yeah it is.” “What I mean is, I don’t want it to get funded” I explained. “Why? You could put this on your college application. Do you know how much this could do for your future education?” He sounded like he was a salesman trying to sell something to me, but I honestly think he was being real. “Whatever, but thanks, by the way. Is there anything I need to change?” I asked. “Um, maybe make it flow better? It seems a little choppy.” He pointed to his screen where I could see my work being displayed. “Okay.” I turned back to my computer and started to revise. About fifteen minutes later, I had come up with this:

Kids learn in multiple ways, through apps, teachers, and books. My idea is we can write a picture book about writing, we could teach kids all about CHAT. We would have to make it kid friendly, because CHAT would be a hard concept for a fifth grader to grasp. We could put this book into the middle school after we publish it. We can go through the classrooms and read it to the kids, and make sure they learn all about CHAT. This project will take a lot of materials and creativity. (Brown Minigrant Application 2)

That sounds good. Looks like I can just send this in now. I heard lockers starting to slam—my cue that class was over. My computer screen went blank and so did my head; all thoughts of school vanished as I walked out of the WMS doors.

“Okay, today we are going to write our minigrant narratives” Mrs. Kieffer said, “But first, you are going to write a memo to the person sitting

next to you about the kind of feedback you would like to receive.” “Minigrant narratives?!” I whispered to my partner. “Yeah,” he said. He already had his Chromebook opened to his application. He scrolled down under his cover sheet, revealing a page of questions. *So, I have to answer all those questions?! Well, doesn't look like I have a choice so I might as well get started. Memo first though, I thought.*

I unzipped my Chromebook case and thought about my memo. The first memo we wrote was about the memoir we had to write. The memoir was our first genre, I wrote mine about my shirt flying off when we ran the mile in 2nd grade (it was not my best day). I remembered that memos were supposed to be about a page long and were a formal genre, usually used in office workplaces. I navigated myself to Google Classroom, where Mrs. Kieffer had four questions for us to answer in our memo. I started to write the “To/From/Subject/Date” in a separate document. *Okay, first question: “What is the most important thing Dr. Walker should understand?” I don't know, why are we doing this again?* I started to answer the first question, and soon my whole memo was finished (Figure 4).

<p>To: Mrs. Kieffer, Christian Buck From: Olivia Brown Subject: Mini Grant Date: October 5, 2015</p> <p>The most important things Dr. Walker should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I am trying to teach kids about C.H.A.T. so we can't include everything. ● This is a project I actually want to do. This is something I think most people in our class would enjoy. ● If we can put our book into the public library so many more kids can learn about C.H.A.T. <p>I am doing well in these areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ideas. I came up with a great idea for this mini grant. ● Description. I think I am doing a good job at describing how we can accomplish this project. <p>The following things aren't working out for me:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Grammar. Grammar has never been my best area of writing and I haven't really improved in this area. ● Run-on sentences. I use commas a lot where there should be periods. <p>The feedback that would be helpful to me:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Critical. Critical feedback is always good, as long as it's helpful, and usually helps out my writing a lot. ● Praise (or the opposite). I like to know whether I'm doing a good job or not.
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Figure 4: My finished memo.

I then opened up my cover sheet, and prayed that maybe—just maybe—my cover sheet would not have the narrative questions attached. But, sure enough, when I scrolled down the questions were right there, waiting for me. “Please complete the narrative in a separate document. Please provide answers to each of the questions below” (Brown Minigrant Application 3). The words taunted me, as if there was a big emphasis on *each*, and I have to say, I was a bit overwhelmed. *Okay, it’s now or never.* I told myself. I made a new document and named it “Minigrant Narrative.”

I answered the first question: “Describe the project: who, what, where, when, how, etc.” (Brown Minigrant Application 3). I started my narrative as a story, with me walking into class, almost like how I started this article. It wasn’t until the next day in class that I realized it wasn’t supposed to be a story; it was just supposed to be written in paragraph form like a narrative. After banging my head on the table, a few frustrated sighs, and repeatedly hitting the backspace button, I was back where I started. *Alright, let’s do this right.* I told myself. I was *not* going to end up redoing this, again.

I started to answer the first question, properly this time:

My project is aiming to teach kids 5th–6th grade all about CHAT. To do this we will write a picture book, making CHAT extra kid friendly. To write a book we have to find a publisher. I have found many inexpensive options to write and publish a class book. I have at least two people in my class who are wonderful at drawing, so illustrations won’t be a problem. Everyone in my class is very innovative, so I have no doubt that we could write a book. After our book is published, we can read it privately to a few classes at the grade school, and then put it in their library. We can even put the book into our community library. (Brown Minigrant Narrative 1)

I thought the library part was a good addition; if we did put it in the library, everyone would have access to it. I scrolled back to my cover sheet and read the next question. “*What are goals for this project?*” I read in my mind. *Well, I thought, to teach kids about CHAT, obviously. But also for kids to learn about writing, and make it easier for their future teachers. I think it would also be a very good learning experience for the people writing the book. Yeah, I think that sums it up pretty well.*

I translated my thoughts onto the paper and moved on, I continued this process until class ended about 45 minutes later. I really wanted to have this done soon, but I didn’t want to do it at home. I decided that I would just work on it in class, and try my hardest not to get distracted—I get distracted a lot, even yesterday I was trying to write this paper, and I ended up looking at *The Flash*. (I can do research on Grant Gustin).

I opened my Chromebook and started working on my narrative straight away. I typed fiercely and channeled all my negative energy towards this project into productiveness. I used the fact that I just wanted to be done with the minigrant as motivation, and soon enough I finished. I read the ending to my narrative, “I think that if someone wants to write about a bunch of eighth graders teaching kids about CHAT, then yes, it is very suitable for the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*” (Brown Minigrant Narrative 2). *That sounds like something I would say*, I thought. I like writing how I would talk. It makes me seem more original as a writer, rather than just writing something exactly how someone else would write it. I decided after rereading my whole narrative that it would be done—after peer editing and revising of course.

I walked into class, ready to near the end of the minigrant application process, and this time the end really was near. “Read your partner’s memo, and then their narrative. Give them helpful feedback, not just dumb comments,” Mrs. Kieffer said. “Send your stuff to me,” I told my partner. “I already did,” he said. *Of course you did*, I thought, rolling my eyes. I logged on to my computer and shared my things with my partner. I started to read his memo. By the time I finished he was already reading through my narrative and taking notes. Actually, everyone had finished their memos and were commenting. *Wow, I am a really slow reader*, I thought. I read through his narrative and almost everything was perfect, as always.

As ELA 4 ended Mrs. Kieffer said: “If all of you are finished we can send these in tomorrow.” *Yes! Finally, FINISHED WITH THIS*. A wave of relief washed over me when she said those few words.

The next day we turned in our final drafts to Mrs. Kieffer, who would then turn them into Dr. Walker, the director of the ISU writing program. “This is it,” my partner said to me. “Unless yours gets chosen,” I said. “Ha, I wish. But there’s no way mine is getting chosen.” “Whatever,” I said. I don’t remember what we did the rest of the day in class, but I remember feeling relieved, and a bit nervous. Would my project be accepted?

A Couple of Weeks Later . . .

Mrs. Kieffer’s classroom phone beeped. “Mrs. Kieffer?” The person on the line said. “Yes? I’m here.” Mrs. Kieffer said. “Could you please send Avery

Fischer and Olivia Brown down to the office?” “Sure, they are on their way,” Mrs. Kieffer said. The person hung up. I felt nervous as I stood up from my chair. Avery and I left ELA and headed down the hallway. It seemed like time was moving slow, like at a snail’s pace slow.

When Avery and I arrived at the office, we were handed white envelopes, with the ISU writing program logo stamped in the corner. We left the office and started on our trek back to ELA. “You know what these are, right?” I asked him. “Yeah, I think so,” he said. Avery ripped his envelope and read his letter right then and there, in the middle of the hallway. As for me? I waited a little bit. I didn’t want to know what my letter said right away. I wanted to leave it unread for a while. Finally, when I couldn’t wait any longer, I ripped my envelope.

“Dear Olivia,” was all I had to read and I knew. It was my project, my proposal. It was real now, and it was happening. Even though this whole time I had been dreading this, I have to admit I was excited. And I was going to face this project head on.

Originally, I was going to include the book writing process in this article. But, the due date told me otherwise. I was only three days away from having to turn in my final draft, and I was still writing about the minigrant proposal. I was also starting to get very frustrated with this article, it just would not be finished. So I decided to just write this article about the proposal. The minigrant process was, however, a learning experience for my whole group. Below is a response from a survey I took:

How do you think our group worked and interacted with each other?

I think that our group worked together pretty well. Since we sat right next to each other our communication and interactions with each other were also good, because we could easily distribute our ideas and thoughts into our book. Even though we may have gotten off topic with M&Ms, we were able to shove that aside and finish the book in time. With our minigrant:

1. We wrote the book together
2. We did research together
3. We wrote a survey together
4. We wrote the draft together
5. We drew the pictures together

Please explain your process of the minigrant project, "CHATing with Chili":

1. Looked at examples to get an idea of what a typical children's book looks like
2. Sent out a survey to get an idea of what 6th graders like to read
3. Decided how we were going to convey CHAT to our readers
4. Decided the characters, traits, storyline, plot, etc.
5. Wrote the first part of story
6. Stopped writing the story to work separately on the different CHAT terms
7. Came back together to write the story and fit all the terms into the story
8. Reviewed and edited
9. Had peers review and edit
10. Got the story into the publisher "app"
11. Looked at and drew pictures
12. Got the pictures into the publisher "app"
13. Sent it to publisher

This project had its rough spots, but we got through them and made a book easily explaining CHAT to kids and adults, *CHATing With Chili* (Figure 5). And that, my friends, is how 8th graders do things that nobody thought we could.

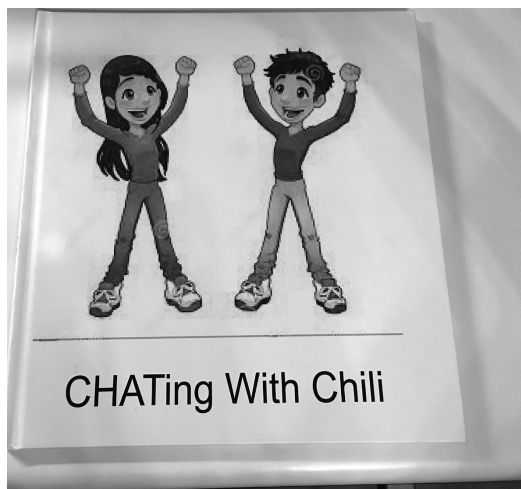


Figure 5: The book we wrote with our minigrant funds, *CHATing With Chili*.

Works Cited

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When writing this article, **Olivia Brown** was an 8th grade student at Washington Middle School (WMS). She enjoys reading, writing (sometimes), music, and most definitely NOT science. She gets distracted easily—wait, is that a picture of Ansel Elgort?—and is extremely happy to FINALLY be done with this article.