

DL 102 — Reading the Solicitation

The document course. The most transferable skill in the discipline: read a solicitation like a professional — compliance pass first, strategy pass second, and the evaluation criteria as the center of gravity.

Course number: DL 102 · **Credit hours:** 3 · **Term:** 14 weeks, one 75-minute session per week (plus independent reading and assignments) · **Audience:** first-year undergraduates · **Prerequisites:** DL 101 (or co-requisite) · **Tier:** introductory (Year 1, Spring) · **Texts:** this repository — the doctrine and the RFP/NOFO literacy maps · **Tools:** none required beyond a web browser for SAM.gov and Grants.gov. Stack-agnostic by design (doctrine/08).

Doctrine spine

`doctrine/02` (RFPs, NOFOs, and solicitations) is the spine, supported by `doctrine/01` (contract vs. grant) and `doctrine/05` (scoring, for the bid/no-bid reading). The reading maps in `literacy/how-to-read-an-rfp.md` and `literacy/how-to-read-a-nofo.md` are the reference layer; the glossary and acronym decoder are open beside you the whole term.

Where this course sits in the program

This is the **document** course. DL 101 taught you the world the documents live in; DL 102 teaches you to read the documents themselves. Every later course — the capture pipeline, pricing, the electives, the capstone — assumes you can open a real RFP or NOFO and find the six questions, the Section L rules, the Section M weights, and the deadline without help.

Ladder: DL 101 (or co-req). Serves as the prerequisite for DL 210 and DL 220, and as a soft prerequisite for DL 301 and DL 302.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this course, a student can:

- Explain why the solicitation exists: the instrument of fairness in public spending.
- Name the solicitation shapes (RFI, RFQ, RFP, NOFO, IDIQ/task order) and read each one as a *posture*.
- Locate the six questions every solicitation answers, in any agency's format.
- Map the uniform contract format (Sections A–M) and explain what Section L and Section M each do.
- Build a compliance matrix from a real RFP: every “shall,” with its page, mapped to where a response would satisfy it.
- Read for strategy: what the agency actually cares about, read from the evaluation weights and the intent behind the “shall”s.

- Apply the same skills to a NOFO: program purpose, eligibility, review criteria, budget, deadlines.
- Manage the two-deadline trap and the invisible third deadline (your own internal review).
- Make a defensible bid/no-bid call from a 15-minute scan of a document.

How the course works

The course moves in three movements:

1. **Weeks 1–6 — The RFP.** The six questions, the A–M anatomy, Section L as the rules of the game, Section M as the rubric you are graded against.
2. **Week 7 — Midterm.** Break down a real RFP in class.
3. **Weeks 8–13 — The NOFO, the matrix, and the call.** The grants sibling, the compliance matrix, the strategy reading, deadlines and amendments, and the 15-minute scan to a bid/no-bid.
4. **Week 14 — Final.** A solicitation reading portfolio built on one real RFP and one real NOFO.

Every week you read a real document. By the end you will have read the same kind of documents a professional capture team reads — and built the tools (compliance matrix, strategy reading, bid/no-bid sheet) they build.

Weekly schedule

Week	Theme	In-session (75 min)	Reading (doctrine / literacy)	Assignment due next week
1	The solicitation as a conversation	Why the document exists: fairness, published rules, committed evaluation. What a solicitation is and is not.	doctrine/02	One-page “what is a solicitation” explainer in your own words

Week	Theme	In-session (75 min)	Reading (doctrine / literacy)	Assignment due next week
2	Solicitation shapes	RFI / RFQ / RFP / NOFO / IDIQ-task order. Each shape as a posture: shopping, pricing, full pursuit, grant pursuit, standing doorway.	doctrine/02; literacy/glossary	A one-page shape chart: five shapes, what each signals, when each appears
3	The six questions	What is being bought? Who is eligible? How will we be judged? When? How must we respond? Where must it go?	doctrine/02	Find all six answers in one real RFP (cite the sections)
4	The uniform contract format	Sections A–M. The two sections to know by heart: L (instructions) and M (evaluation factors).	literacy/how-to-read-an-rfp.md	A one-page A–M map of a real RFP — fill in what each section holds for that document

Week	Theme	In-session (75 min)	Reading (doctrine / literacy)	Assignment due next week
5	Section L — the rules of the game	Volumes, page limits, format, required content, submission mechanics. The rule: comply literally.	literacy/how-to-read-an-rfp.md	A one-page Section L brief: every format rule in the RFP, in checklist form
6	Section M — the evaluation plan	The factors, the weights, the adjectives for “excellent.” The proposal is written to this rubric.	literacy/how-to-read-an-rfp.md	A one-page Section M brief: the factors, weights, and what “excellent” looks like per the agency
7	Midterm	In class: break down a real RFP — six questions, Section L rules, Section M weights, compliance vs. strategy reading.	(review week)	Midterm submission
8	The NOFO — the grants sibling	Same game, different rulebook. RFP buys your services; NOFO funds your mission.	literacy/how-to-read-a-nofo.md; doctrine/01	A one-page “RFP vs. NOFO” comparison table

Week	Theme	In-session (75 min)	Reading (doctrine / literacy)	Assignment due next week
9	The NOFO review criteria	The center of gravity of the grants world. Write to the criteria; mirror the scoring.	literacy/how-to-read-a-nofo.md	A one-page review-criteria brief for a real NOFO
10	The compliance matrix	Every “shall,” every page limit, every certification — tracked to where the response satisfies it. The backbone of the review gates.	literacy/how-to-read-an-rfp.md; doctrine/02	Start your course compliance matrix: every “shall” you can find in your RFP
11	The strategy reading	What does the evaluator actually care about? The intent behind the “shall”s. Compliance is the floor; strategy is the win.	literacy/how-to-read-an-rfp.md; doctrine/02	A one-page strategy reading of your RFP: the story the proposal must tell
12	Deadlines, amendments, the two-deadline trap	The questions deadline, the submission deadline, and the invisible third deadline: your internal review. Amendments as living documents.	literacy/how-to-read-an-rfp.md; doctrine/02	A one-page deadline-and-amendment log for your RFP

Week	Theme	In-session (75 min)	Reading (doctrine / literacy)	Assignment due next week
13	The 15-minute scan to bid/no-bid	The professional's first pass: scope, deadline, evaluation, eligibility → a defensible recommendation.	doctrine/05; literacy/how-to-read-an-rfp.md	A scored bid/no-bid sheet for your RFP (pWin factors, value, recommendation)
14	Final: solicitation reading portfolio	Present your portfolio: A–M map, Section L brief, Section M brief, compliance matrix, strategy reading, bid/no-bid sheet. Panel Q&A.	(review week)	Final portfolio submission

Assessment summary

- **Weekly assignments** — 30% (each a concrete artifact: a chart, a brief, a matrix).
- **Midterm** — 25% (breaking down a real RFP in class).
- **Final solicitation reading portfolio** — 30% (the artifacts from Weeks 4–13, presented and defended).
- **Participation and peer review** — 15%.

Rubric per `course/assessments-and-rubric.md`: the 4-point scale on correctness, completeness, doctrine use, and clarity.

The midterm

In class, with a real (published, closed) RFP you have not seen before, produce in 75 minutes:

1. **The six questions** — answered from the document, with sections cited.

2. **Section L** — the format rules, page limits, and submission mechanics, in checklist form.
3. **Section M** — the evaluation factors, weights, and what “excellent” looks like.
4. **Compliance vs. strategy** — one paragraph on the compliance floor, and one on the strategic story the proposal must tell.
5. **The call** — a one-paragraph bid/no-bid recommendation with the reasoning.

The trap being tested: students who write a beautiful proposal-shaped essay instead of *reading the document as the agency wrote it*. The midterm rewards reading, not writing.

Policies worth stating plainly

- **The doctrine is the course.** Every assignment tests the concept, never a tool. If an assignment ever seems to require knowledge of a specific product or system, that is a bug in the assignment — flag it.
- **Real documents, safe exercises.** We read real RFPs and NOFOs, but always published, closed ones. You never submit anything live in this course.
- **Late work.** The pipeline has deadlines; so does the course. The one professional grace: an honest early warning beats a silent late submission.
- **Academic integrity.** The federal market runs on trust in a fair, documented process. This course models that. Cite your sources; do not fabricate evidence; be the person the market can trust.

The course in one sentence

By Week 14 you will have read a real RFP and a real NOFO the way a professional reads them — compliance matrix in hand, evaluation weights memorized, and a bid/no-bid call you can defend — and you will have discovered that the ability to read a solicitation is the most transferable skill in the entire discipline.