

General Tips for Preparing a Well-Written Proposal

Reviewers only have a finite amount of time and energy to devote to your grant proposal. Applicants frequently make common writing mistakes that reviewers may judge harshly. You want your reviewers to spend their time on evaluating your science instead of downgrading you for the extra effort needed to understand and follow your proposal.

Below are some tips that can make the most of limited space and help you avoid *Reviewer Backlash*.

Your Abstract

The abstract should summarize only the important information from the proposal. It should provide brief background, significance and plan of action, not details that will be repeated elsewhere.

Provide a Roadmap

Provide a “roadmap” that makes your proposal easy to follow. If reviewers have to use up all their energy in the first few pages just to figure out what is going on, they will have none left to make a thorough review of your project. Use the section headers provided in the program guidelines and add sub-headers and bullets when needed. Make sure numbering within a document makes sense for figures and tables. And don’t forget that white space is welcomed by a reader who must evaluate a lot of content.

Follow your own Roadmap

Make sure that each section contains the information that the header indicates. For example, don’t put information explaining the significance of your project in the background section, or detailed results in the significance section. This practice will help reviewers follow your roadmap and save valuable space.

Use formatting judiciously

Use formatting to set apart section or subsection headers. It may also be used *occasionally* to emphasize text that should stand out. Use only **one** formatting style at a time: *italics*, underline, or **bold**. Underlining or bolding text too often is distracting to the reader.

Don’t repeat yourself verbatim

If it is necessary to repeat information throughout your proposal, be sure to state it in a different way so that you don’t repeat the exact same information over and over.

Beware of typos, spelling errors, and grammatical mistakes

Watch out for typos and spelling errors. Beware of incorrect spell check corrections that may change your intended word into something else. Watch out when using similar but incorrect words, e.g., rational instead of rationale. Don’t mix plural and singular forms in a sentence.

Be specific

Avoid starting sentences with “this” or other general subject terms. It is not always clear what “this” or “its” refers to.

Don’t use hyperbole

Exaggeration or excessive claims for the importance of your work will make reviewers suspect of its value.

Write out terms the first time used

The first time you use a term be sure to write it out in full and indicate how it will be abbreviated.

For More Information on Preparing Successful Grant Proposals:

NCBiotech offers additional grant writing resources on its website at <http://www.ncbiotech.org/grantwriting>

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