

NIH Grant Writing

Tips from Reviewers

DO

- Break up text heavy pages with headings, sub-headings, schematics and figures
- Put title of proposal on first page (aims)
- Make it easy to navigate and reference key points/data quickly
- Highlight key preliminary data with the impact to the proposed work (this demonstrates that...)
- Include a summary of approach figure/schematic in specific aims or Introduction section to help the Reviewer understand how the aims build on each other and fit in the overall project goal
- Include figures that illustrate the overall project scope on the 1st page of significance, as well as images that illustrate each Aim.'
- Emphasize/repeat major key points in different sections (aims, intro, results, research plan)
- For NIH - bullet or numbered list of significance and innovation
- Clearly articulate innovation – so that someone not in your immediate field would understand the impact
- Leave space between paragraphs so it is easier to read (don't pack it all in!)
- Use the largest font size possible for preliminary data figures labels and text so they are easily readable
- Put n vales and scales in data figures
- Power analysis underlying the justification of sample size should be part of the experimental design section and again in the vertebrate animal section
- Avoid typos (spell check should catch most of them)
- Discuss 'real' potential limitations and alternative strategies
- Clearly define investigator roles WITHIN proposal.
- Clearly describe each investigator's role (personnel justification, approach, biosketches)
- Include information that supports collaboration – number of joint publications, meetings, etc. (in approach and personnel justification)

DO NOT

- Aims that are completely dependent on previous aim
- Assume that your reviewer is in your specific area - highlight impact of key findings or advantages of approach
- Use too much highlighting, underlining, italicization
- Use small fonts in figures
- Use microscopic figures with useless one sentence captions that require reviewers to go back to text to figure out abbrev, etc.
- Make figures so small they are not readable
- Overuse acronyms or make plot labels difficult to identify
- Ignore formatting requirements - ever-changing, so keep up to date
- Improperly formatted biosketches and inclusion of papers under review
- Mis-cited or dead references (v. annoying and suggests carelessness).
- Only cite your previous mentor and your work.
- For NIH - do not forget the authentication document with consideration of sex as a biological variable
- Ignore previous review critique or insufficient revision to address concerns