Grant Writing for Success: Influence of the New NIH Guidelines
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Tips on Formatting

1. To make text readable:
   a. Put line breaks between paragraphs
   b. Have a reasonable margin width – 1 inch
   c. To save space:
      i) Auto-hyphenate
      ii) Use full justification
      iii) Single space after each period
   d. Use a consistent heading and numbering system

2. Apply strategies of newspaper journalists
   a. Make readers want to read what you write:
      i) Questions, case examples, sidebars, callouts, images, color, readable text
   b. Newspaper headlines: use the fewest words to inform and “hook” the reader
      i) Title, specific aims, section headings
   c. The introductory paragraph: a broad, conceptual overview
      i) Increases interest in the details that follow
      ii) Don’t bury the reviewers too quickly in detail
   d. Style of writing: simple and direct

Using an Effective Tone and Writing Style

1. Tone to convey in proposals:
   a. Thoughtful
   b. Detail-oriented, but you can see the big picture
   c. Enthusiastic and realistic
   d. Not to impress, but to convey meaning

2. Ways to engage your reader:
   a. Use the first person, use questions, journalistic approach, show images, give examples, vary sentence length, linking/transitioning

3. Important style considerations:
   a. Write in clear, simple declarative sentences
   b. Brevity is saintly
   c. Avoid the use of clichés and empty generalities
   d. Avoid the use of nouns as adjectives
   e. Avoid the use of weak qualifying words
   f. Use the right word when two words are closely related

Organizing the Sections of Your Grant

1. Specific Aims
   a. Judicious use of subtle highlighting
   b. Prepare a bullet outline
      i) Expand into sentences and link ideas
   c. Introductory paragraph
      i) Opening sentence
      ii) Current knowledge
      iii) Gap in the knowledge
   d. What, Why, Who paragraph
      i) Long-term goal
      ii) Overall objective
      iii) Central hypothesis/how it was formulated
      iv) Rationale
   e. Specific Aims
i) Convey why that part is being proposed
ii) Hypothesis driven
iii) Do not emphasize what will be done
iv) Avoid descriptive approach
v) Write aims globally to encompass alternatives
vi) Narrow the focus with the working hypothesis

f. Payoff paragraph
i) Expected outcomes
ii) Generality regarding positive impact

2. Significance (½ page)
   Part 1: a critical analysis of the literature
   Part 2: the statement of significance
   Part 3: expected benefits of your contribution

3. Innovation (½ page)
   Part 1: document what the norm has been
   Part 2: the statement of innovation
   Part 3: positive impact of innovation

4. Approach
   a. Emphasis on the content, quality, and impact of the science
   b. Introduction
      i) Justify why the work needs to be done
      ii) Working hypothesis
      iii) Aim’s objective
      iv) Overall strategy
      v) Summarize overall outcome and positive impact
   c. Justification & Feasibility
      i) Review of the literature
         1) Focus on justifying the need for that part of the research
         2) Critical analysis of published studies
         3) Use primary literature and up-to-date citations
      ii) Preliminary Data
         1) Only studies that support the project’s feasibility in your hands

b. Research Design
   i) Provide meaningful detail
      1) Has anyone on the team published on this methodology?
      2) Does my training make it obvious I can do the methodology?
      3) Do I have preliminary data demonstrating I can do the methodology?
   ii) Write an explanatory title for each study

c. Expected outcomes – return on investment
   1) Summarize the expected outcomes
   2) Convey how they collectively achieve the aim’s objective
   3) Do not overstate your expectations

d. Potential Problems & Alternative Strategies
   i) Nature of the perceived problem
   ii) Reason why you don’t think it is likely
   iii) What alternative approach would you employ

An Effective Grant Proposal:
1. Follows instructions and addresses the mission of the grantor
2. Is a marketing document that sells the idea
3. Has a good idea and clear, effective communication
4. Is written both for experts and nonexperts
5. Edit and proof
   a. Research Editorial Office:
      http://www.unmc.edu/research_editorial.htm
      Email: jessica.mercer@unmc.edu

Sources:
Casella, P. Workshop on Grant Writing for Academic Success.
http://funding.niaid.nih.gov/ncn/grants/cycle/part04.htm#3