Honing an Abstract

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NIH Project Summary/Abstract

- Max 30 lines

- Project's broad, long-term objectives and aims

- Description of research design and methods for achieving the stated goals

- NO proprietary or confidential information (this statement will be publicly available)

- Plain language – non-scientist should understand importance of project

NSF Project Summary

- Max one page
- Overview:
  - description of activity that would result if proposal is funding, and
  - statement of objectives and methods to be employed
- Intellectual merit – potential to advance knowledge
- Broader impacts – potential to benefit society
- Should be understandable to broad audience within scientific domain

Source: https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappg20_1/pappg_2.jsp

How is the Abstract/Summary used?

- Critical first impression of the project – but more importantly, of YOU
- At NIH
  - 3 reviewers read grant in depth and present review to rest of committee
  - ALL the members of the committee will VOTE
  - Others may only read the Abstract
- Possible quick reference for the Program Officer
- If funded, the Abstract becomes a public, searchable document

Goals: GET the reader's attention, KEEP the reader's attention

Tell a STORY – even with the abstract:

- Introduce the situation

- Establish what is at stake

- Explain how this project will confront/push/extend current understanding

- Briefly explain what type of work will be conducted

- Wrap up, making sure to remind reader <u>why</u> this project matters

Everything presented in an abstract should:

- Tie to the goal
- Build your argument
- Reinforce your choices

Discussion Instructions

- Read each of the abstracts
- Discuss strengths and weaknesses of each
- Identify role of each sentence or group of sentences, e.g.:
  - Background info
  - Broad/long-term objectives
  - Specific aims
  - Research design and methods
  - Etc...

Full-group discussion notes:

- 2nd abstract – confusing first sentence
  - Not clear how findings would contribute to field
  - Clear cut aims
  - More of a story
- 1st abstract – dense
  - Text copy and pasted from background section
  - Too much set-up; not enough methods
  - Progression seems wrong
  - Stereotype threat – be sure that is clear

Full-group discussion notes:

- 2nd abstract
  - Not sure what words in quote meant
  - Fuzzier
  - Not clear how they would address aims and analyze results
  - Missed period
- 1st abstract
  - Good at defining
  - Too many partentheses, dashes, slashes

How is Abstract written?

Usually last. Why?

- Grant evolves during writing – at the end, you know <u>exactly</u> what it says. That's what goes in the Abstract.

- Don't forget about it! Leave enough time to do a good job.

- Adjust proposal if you discover sentences there aren't crisp enough for the abstract

Tips for Success

- Write with **clarity** and **confidence.**
- <u>Work</u> to ensure that your ideas flow **logically**.
- Only include what is essential to <u>your</u> project --- tangential information about the field or others' research does not belong here.
- Write **simply** – don't stress your reviewer – how they FEEL affects how they will judge your application.
  - Remove all unnecessary words and phrases
  - Use simple, short, direct sentences
  - Use active verbs, avoid passive voice
  - Use adjectives and adverbs minimally
  - Avoid clichés
  - Avoid jargon

Thank you!

Feel free to contact us with questions.

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