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Tips for Proposal Writers

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I am reviewing a bunch of proposals now for my panel. If you are writing a proposal *please* keep in mind that many of your reviewers will be reading 10+ proposals in a short period of time, not all of which are well within their expertise. I never appreciated how difficult it is to do a good and thorough job until doing it myself!

My 10 quick tips:

1. Use figures. Really. It helps break up the text, illustrates your thoughts and plans, and can help someone vaguely familiar with a technique remember more about how it works. You don't need preliminary data as much as schematics and cartoons.
2. Use paragraphs! The wall o' text is REALLY hard to read through while maintaining concentration for 80+ pages!
3. Define your acronyms and abbreviations. Not everyone will remember the abbreviations you use in your daily work, especially after eight hours on a panel.
4. Make sure you refer to others working in your field who have made significant advances, not just your group and your collaborators/friends. People on the panel WILL notice this one! Don't get lazy on lit review.
5. Make sure your proposed research is easy to find. In some of the proposals I am reading, it is difficult to figure out what has been done recently, what is background, and what will be done with the money over the course of the proposal.
6. Use headers! Go ahead and bold them. When I need to go back to look for something, I want it to be easy to find.
7. Don't blow off broader impacts/diversity statements. They WILL be read, remarked on, and used for funding decisions. The top proposals have both awesome science and well-planned broader impacts, so just awesome science alone won't cut it.
8. If your proposal is a team proposal, clearly state what each team member will do. Don't just add names and not talk about their research contributions. Saying that "Professor X will make calculations in support of the experiment" or "Professor Y will characterize the samples" is NOT a research contribution!
9. If your proposal has both theory and experimental parts, talk about how the two parts will be integrated. Team proposals should be TEAMS, not 2 cool PIs working in parallel. If that is the case, you each should have written a separate proposal.
10. Be concise and as clear as possible. If you have to make a choice, though, pick clarity.

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Prodigal Academic is the pseudonym of a scientist and [blogger](#). [1]

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