

HOW TO CRAFT A SUCCESSFUL SPECIFIC AIMS PAGE

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- ▶ Basics
- ▶ Anatomy of an Aims Page
- ▶ Other grantsmanship considerations
- ▶ Reviewers' Perspective

OUTLINE

▶ **What is your primary role in VA?**

- ▶ Student, trainee, or fellow
- ▶ Career Development Awardee (CDA)
- ▶ Mid-career Investigator (e.g., Associate Professor; GS-14)
- ▶ Senior Investigator (e.g., Professor; GS-15)
- ▶ Non-research (e.g., clinician; administrator; policymaker)

POLL QUESTION #1

- ▶ **What best describes your grant writing experience?**
 - ▶ I have never written a grant
 - ▶ I have only written a CDA or equivalent (e.g., K award)
 - ▶ I have written a few grants (e.g., 2 – 3)
 - ▶ I consider myself an accomplished grant writer (e.g., 5+)

POLL QUESTION #2

- ▶ 1-page overview of the project you are proposing.
- ▶ Most important part of the grant proposal!
 - ▶ What's the health problem and why is it important?
 - ▶ What's the gap in knowledge and how does your project fill this gap?
- ▶ Read the RFA / RFP and craft accordingly.
- ▶ Draft early and take time to fine-tune.
- ▶ Feedback, feedback, feedback!

BASICS



▶ **DISCLAIMER:** Be wary of templates or formulas.

▶ The Hourglass Model:

1. Introductory Paragraph(s)
2. The Research Goal Paragraph
3. The Aims Section
4. The Summary Paragraph



ANATOMY OF AN AIMS PAGE

- ▶ The Hook
- ▶ State of the Science
- ▶ Gap in Knowledge
- ▶ Critical Need

INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH(S)

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- ▶ What is the scope of the health problem?
 - ▶ Capture the reviewers' attention.
 - ▶ Convey a sense of importance or urgency.
 - ▶ Quickly explain what your research topic is and why your proposed research is critical.
 - ▶ 1 – 2 sentences.
 - ▶ Use “sticky” ideas (Heath & Heath, 2008)



INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH(S): ***THE HOOK***

- ▶ What is known about the problem?
 - ▶ Ground the reviewer in the key findings of the content area.
 - ▶ Only the necessary details to help reviewers understand why you are proposing the work.
 - ▶ 3 – 5 sentences.

INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH(S):
STATE OF THE SCIENCE

- ▶ What key information is not yet known about the problem?
 - ▶ Make as explicit as possible:
 - ▶ e.g., “A critical gap in knowledge in the treatment of cancer is....”
 - ▶ Consider italicizing, underlining, or bolding this statement.

INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH(S):
GAP IN KNOWLEDGE

- ▶ What is the innovation that you are proposing?
 - ▶ e.g., new knowledge; new treatment; new model of care.
- ▶ How does the innovation fill the gap in knowledge?
 - ▶ Make clear this is the logical next step to advance the science in this area.

INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH(S):
CRITICAL NEED

- ▶ What is your overarching objective or hypothesis in this proposal?
 - ▶ Use simple, general language that communicates the long-term goal.
 - ▶ Consider also highlighting this statement.
- ▶ What is the approach you will take to achieve this objective?
- ▶ Is the approach feasible? Is the team qualified to carry it out?

THE RESEARCH GOAL PARAGRAPH

- ▶ Describe each aim you will conduct to achieve the overarching objective.
 - ▶ Enumerate and delineate each.
 - ▶ Typically 2 – 4 specific aims.
 - ▶ Order matters! (make clear what is primary)
- ▶ Aims should communicate what you are going to do, how you are going to it, and what you expect to find.
 - ▶ Strong aims have specific, measurable, and attainable outcomes.
- ▶ Aims should be logically connected to, but NOT contingent with, one another.

THE AIMS SECTION

- ▶ **Aim 1**: Test the effectiveness of *[INTERVENTION X]* to reduce risk of relapse for Veterans with alcohol use disorder. At 3- and 6-months post-baseline, we hypothesize that Veterans who were randomized to *[INTERVENTION X]*, vs. usual care, will have:
 - ▶ a). greater percent days abstinent from alcohol on the Timeline Follow-Back Interview,
 - ▶ b). lower levels of psychiatric distress, based on the Brief Symptom Inventory, and
 - ▶ c). Fewer episodes of detoxification in acute care settings.

THE AIMS SECTION: ***EXAMPLE***

- ▶ Often overlooked.
- ▶ Reiterate the global significance of the proposed work.
 - ▶ How is it **innovative**?
 - ▶ How does it **impact** the target population?
 - ▶ Is it responsive to **priorities**? (e.g., legislative; national agencies; operational partners)

THE SUMMARY PARAGRAPH

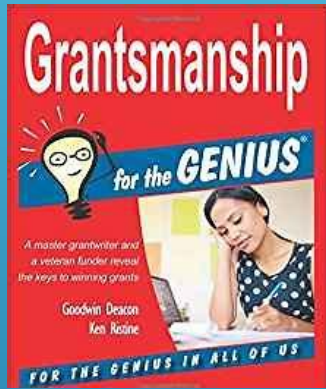
- ▶ **Highlight** key concepts (be judicious!)
- ▶ Introduce key acronyms (3 - 4 max).
- ▶ Highlight notable endorsements.
- ▶ Avoid jargon.
- ▶ Limit multi-clause sentences and use of parentheticals.
- ▶ Use language that conveys assurance in significance of the work.
- ▶ Preempt critiques based on feedback.

OTHER GRANTSMANSHIP CONSIDERATIONS

- ▶ Does the proposed work address an important problem? **(Significance)**
- ▶ Does it build upon extant knowledge in a novel and substantive way? **(Innovation)**
- ▶ Is the design/methods sound? **(Approach)**
- ▶ Are there preliminary data to support the idea? **(Feasibility)**
- ▶ Is the PI/project team well position to carry this out? **(Qualifications)**

REVIEWERS' PERSPECTIVE

Good Grantsmanship



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Good Timing

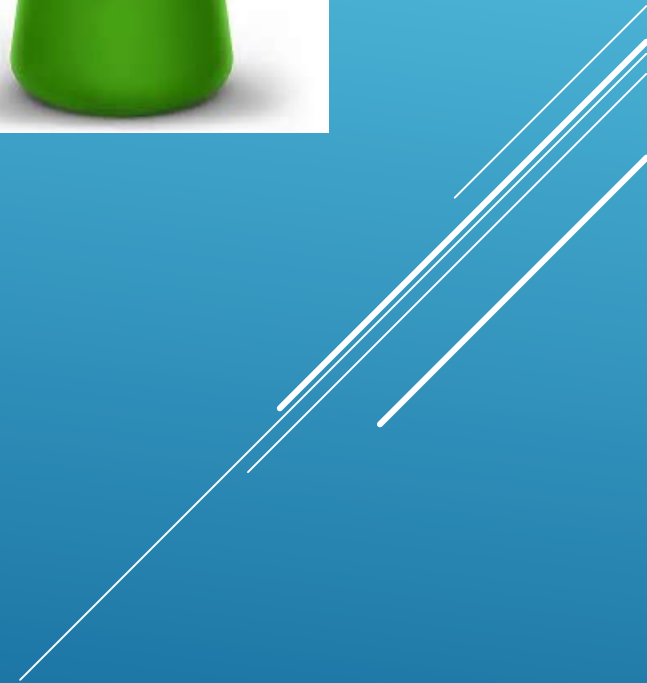


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Good luck



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▶ Questions?



- ▶ BioScience Writers [Michelle S.]. *NIH Grant Applications: The Anatomy of a Specific Aims Page*. Retrieved on 11/06/2018 from <http://www.biosciencewriters.com/NIH-Grant-Applications-The-Anatomy-of-a-Specific-Aims-Page.aspx>.
- ▶ Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2008): *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*. Random House: New York.
- ▶ Peyman, J.A., Robinson, W. H., & Allen, K. D. (2014). Specific Aims – Do's and Don'ts. [Webinar of the American College of Rheumatology]. Retrieved on 11/06/2018 from <https://www.rheumatology.org/Portals/0/Files/Specific%20Aims%20-%20Do's%20and%20Don'ts.pdf>.

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