

When is a reviewer correct?

A reviewer is always correct, even when they're not.

Second Chances: How to Handle a Revision

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Interactive Learning

Multiple choice

1. Question on screen
2. Choose your answer(s)

Write in

1. Question on screen
2. Type your answer in question box

Write Your Answer in Question Box

**What is something you believe you
can never do in responding to
reviewer comments?**

No rules, only principles

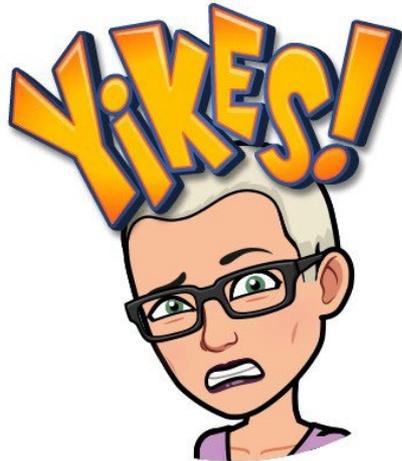
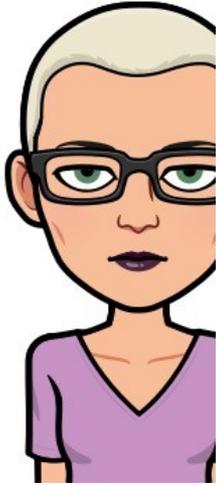
The answer to, "Can I...?" is always, "Sure."

The real question is why you want to do it.

Grant resubmission

- Review committee
 - Reviewer critiques
 - Reviewer summaries (key strengths, key weaknesses)
 - Key summary points (resume)
 - Score
- You
 - Intro (3 pages for VA; 1 page for NIH)
 - Changes to text

**NOT
GONNA
HAPPEN**



Remember...

- Only 1 audience: reviewers
- Only 1 job: make this the easiest possible grant to review
- Only 1 chance: you didn't get it right the first time

Tips

- Talk with your program officer
- Work with your co-investigators
- Get outside opinions



ATOLLS



ATOLLS

- Attitude
- Table & theme
- Organization
- Layout of response
- Language for response
- Shaping text

TIP 1: Attitude

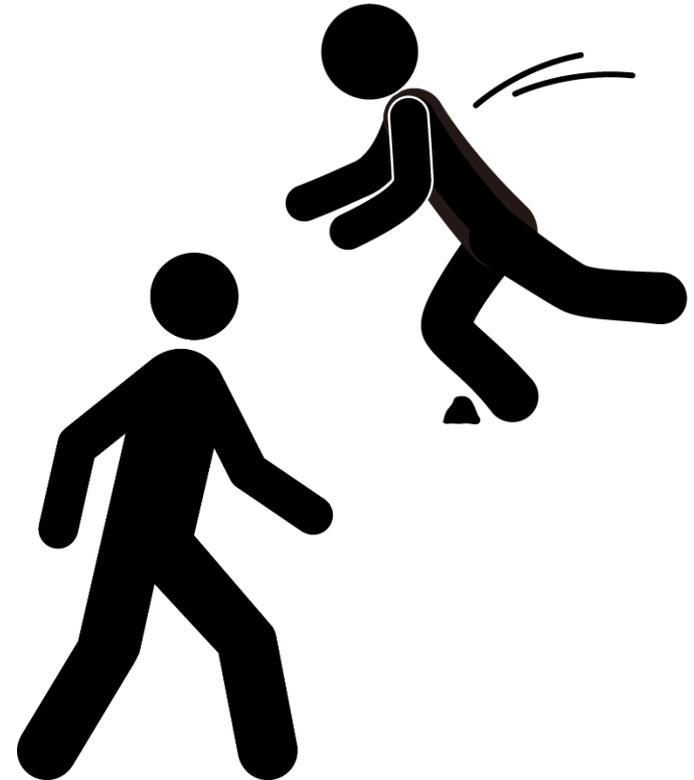


Promote cognitive ease in your reviewer



Strain → vigilance,
suspicion, error prone

Ease → good mood, prone
to like what you see



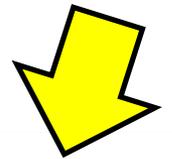
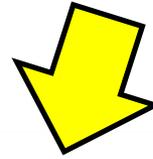
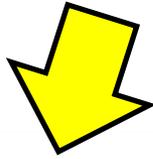
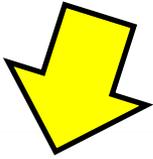
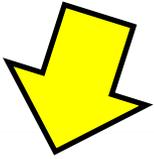
Write Your Answer in Question Box

Imagine you have reviewer comments you disagree with. Your instinct is to push back and say they're wrong.

What is your most helpful technique to change your attitude?

TIP 2: Table & Themes

1. Go through review & highlight all negative comments
 - Highlight positive comments in separate color
2. Create a table
3. Populate with all negative comments (exact quotes)
 1. Make sure each individual idea has its own row

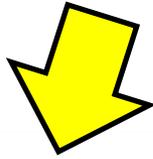


Point #	Who	Theme	Critique	Response
	Key Summary Point		The interdependency of Aim 3 on the results of Aim 2 is a concern.	
	Reviewer 1		Methods for Aim 1 leaves out important information.	
	Reviewer 2		Aim 1 would benefit from providing more details.	
	Reviewer 3		Unanticipated roadblocks along the way might imperil completion of the planned work.	

POLL #1

For a grant that was discussed, what is the most important part of a review statement? (choose 1)

1. Reviewer critiques
2. Reviewer summaries
3. Key summary points (resume)
4. Score



Point #	Who	Theme	Critique	Response
	Key Summary Point	Aim 3 dependency on Aim 2	The interdependency of Aim 3 on the results of Aim 2 is a concern.	
	Reviewer 1	Aim 1 methods	Methods for Aim 1 leaves out important information.	
	Reviewer 2	Aim 1 methods	Aim 1 would benefit from providing more details.	
	Reviewer 3	Didn't address potential roadblocks	Unanticipated roadblocks along the way might imperil completion of the planned work.	

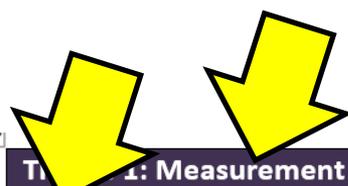
Themes

Create themes

- Use Key Summary points as main organizing ideas
 - Add others as needed
 - Lump small comments at end into “Other comments” or “Other major” and “Other minor”

Themes

1. Organize table by themes (theme column becomes row header)
2. Prioritize by Key Summary points, then other important issues, then increasingly minor issues
3. Remember to lump all common comments under the same theme
 1. Comments may fall under more than one theme
 2. Comments may need further splitting because they don't completely overlap with one theme



Theme 1: Measurement development

Point #	Who	Critique	Response
	Key Summary Point 2	There is inadequate detail describing how the measure that would be used.	
1		Methods for Aim 1 leaves out important information.	
2		Aim 1 would benefit from providing more details.	

Theme 2: Aim 2 methodological concerns

	Key Summary Point 3	There are significant methodological concerns identified in the individual reviewer critiques.	
1		Methods for Aim 2 leaves out important information.	
2		Aim 2 is ambitious and might benefit from scaling back.	

Theme 3: Dependencies between Aim 3 and Aim 2

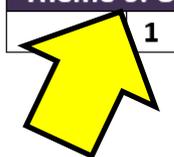
	Key Summary Point 4	The interdependency of Aim 3 on the results of Aim 2 is a concern.	
1		Aim 3 has significant dependencies	
2		Aim 3 includes both intervention development and pilot testing that is based on findings on Aim 2.	
3		Aim 3 depends to identification of portable/implementable action items in Aim 2, which might not be what Aim 2 produces.	

Theme 4: Overall feasibility

2		Blah, blah	
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Theme 6: Other minor comments

1		Blah, blah	
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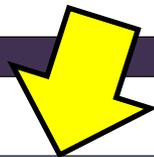
TIP 3: Organization

1. Number comments
2. Organize comments within each theme
 - Group like with like; refer overlapping comments back to main comment
 - Pay attention to nuanced differences
 - Add hypercritical comments to larger themes (not a theme on their own)
 - Note where reviewers disagree



Theme 1: Measurement development

Point #	Who	Critique	Response
1	Key Summary Point 2	There is inadequate detail describing how the measure that would be used.	See responses to Points 3-7.
2	1	Methods for Aim 1 leaves out important information.	See responses to Points 3-7.
3	2	Aim 1 would benefit from providing more details.	
...			

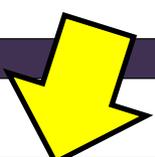


Theme 2: Aim 2 methodological concerns

8	Key Summary Point 3	There are significant methodological concerns identified in the individual reviewer critiques.	See responses to Points 10-20.
9	1	Methods for Aim 2 leaves out important information.	See responses to Points 10-20.
10	2	Aim 2 is ambitious and might benefit from scaling back.	
...			

Theme 3: Dependencies between Aim 3 and Aim 2

21	Key Summary Point 4	The interdependency of Aim 3 on the results of Aim 2 is a concern.	
22	1	Aim 3 has significant dependencies	See response to Point 21.
23	2	Aim 3 includes both intervention development and pilot testing that is based on findings on Aim 2.	See response to Point 21.
24	3	Aim 3 is to develop and pilot a study and is dependent on feedback from Aims 1 and 2.	



Theme 4: Overall feasibility

25	2	Blah, blah	
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TIP 4: Layout of response

- Draft responses in table
- Share table with co-investigators, others
- Refine responses

POLL #2

Who are good candidates to read your response table? (choose all that apply)

1. Colleagues in your field
2. Colleagues outside your field
3. Mentors
4. Colleagues who owe you favor
5. Colleagues critical of your work

Tips

- Don't fix what's not broken
- Be highly responsive
- Be honest—think like a marketing professional

Tips

- Bullet out your strategy; don't worry initially about wording
- Start with a broad pass at all critiques
 - Note what critiques likely drove the score (where reviewers agree, where the critique is strong and large)
 - Note where reviewers disagree & design response carefully
 - Remember criticism may point to lack of clarity

Tips

- After each main strategy is firm, go deep into individual critique responses
- Avoid making substantial changes in actual grant text until table response is final

TIP 5: Language for Response

- Create outline for Intro (response to reviewers document)
 - Begin with score-driving issues to which you have strong response
 - Use subthemes
 - Use 1-3-2 at document, theme, and paragraph level
 - Sandwich smaller critical comments
- Ensure all points are covered, all reviewers included

Write Your Answer in Question Box

How would you frame your response to the following critique (1-3 sentences)? Remember 1-3-2.

Investigator team lacks expertise.

Tips

- 1-3-2
 - Critique was helpful
 - Thought about X, Y, and Z but X and Y don't work because...
 - We now do [details of Z]

My example answers

- We added two internationally-renowned experts as co-investigators to augment our team's considerable experience.
- We now clarify how the considerable experience of our team directly pertains to the grant application. We decided against adding additional investigators due to resource constraints. But in the period between grant submissions two of our co-investigators undertook additional training, solidifying their expertise in relevant areas.

TIP 6: Shaping text

- Only 1 audience: reviewers
- Only 1 job: make this the easiest possible grant to review
- Only 1 chance: you didn't get it right the first time

Tips for Intro

- Begin with overview
 - Can use positive comments here
 - Can summarize major revisions
- Themes

Tips for Intro

- Remember cognitive ease
- Use direct quotes, indicated with quotation marks
- Value white space

Example Intro text: Overview

- We appreciate the thoughtful feedback on the first are gratified there was a consistent sense across critiques regarding strengths of the proposal as reflected in.... We thoroughly embraced We now describe.... Major revisions to the proposal include the following.
 - We revised...
 - We redesigned...
 - We augmented...

Below we detail.... In the proposal, we delineate changes with a blue vertical line adjacent to the right margin (see example to right).

Example Intro text : Themes

- Theme 1: “Scientific justification for the approach needs clarification” (Key Summary point 2)
- Theme 2: “Lack of hypotheses” (Key Summary point 1 and Critiques 1 and 2)
- Theme 2: “Insufficient attention to power calculations and various parameters are not justified.” (Key Summary point 3; Critique 2)

Example Intro text : Subthemes

- Theme 1: “Scientific justification for the approach needs clarification” (Key Summary point 2)
 - Subtheme 1a: “The ‘positive deviance’ approach to quality is innovative... [but] as research, its innovation is tempered.” (Critique 2)
 - Subtheme 1b: “Without a control group, it seems impossible to identify factors unique to high-performing sites.” (Critique 3)

Tips for cutting grant text

Picture a strong reason to cut

REJECTION





im

possible

Tips for cutting grant text

- Preserve white space
- Consider removing/shortening figures/tables
- Cut 1 sentence from every paragraph
- Make every paragraph move up at least one line

Prior sessions

- **Grant Writing, Session 1:** How and what to cut: A primer on editing your own work
https://www.hsrdr.research.va.gov/for_researchers/cyber_seminars/archives/video_archive.cfm?SessionID=3683
- **Grant Writing, Session 2:** Tips from experts on how (and how not) to write
https://www.hsrdr.research.va.gov/for_researchers/cyber_seminars/archives/video_archive.cfm?SessionID=3684&Seriesid=96
- **Grant Writing, Session 3:** How to organize your writing for maximum impact
https://www.hsrdr.research.va.gov/for_researchers/cyber_seminars/archives/video_archive.cfm?SessionID=3685

ATOLLS

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- Layout of response
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WHY?

Other resources

- Lisa Chasan-Taber's *Writing Dissertation and Grant Proposals: Epidemiology, Preventive Medicine and Biostatistics*, chapter 20
<https://people.umass.edu/lisact/textbook/Chapter20.pdf>
- NIAID's information on revising and resubmitting an application <https://www.niaid.nih.gov/grants-contracts/revise-resubmit-application>
- *PLOS Computational Biology's* Ten Simple Rules series article on writing a response to reviewers
<https://journals.plos.org/ploscompbiol/article?id=10.1371/journal.pcbi.1005730>

Website for Tips

<https://writebetterproposals.org>

The image shows the top portion of a website. At the top left, the text "Write Better Proposals" is written in a pink, sans-serif font. To the right, a navigation menu contains the words "HOME", "TIPS", "ABOUT", and "CONTACT" in a small, grey, uppercase font. The background of the header is a dark grey/black image featuring a glowing lightbulb in the center, surrounded by faint white chalk-like scribbles. A large, bright pink circle is positioned on the right side of the header, containing the text "Get tips in your inbox" in white, bold, sans-serif font. Below this circle is a white rectangular button with the text "CLICK HERE" in black, uppercase font. Below the header is a dark grey/black section with the text "Grant Proposal Writing Tips and More" in white, bold, sans-serif font. Underneath this is a horizontal menu with the following items: "All Posts", "Attitude", "Basics", "Career", "Editing", "Grammar", "Mentoring", "Organization", "Polishing", "Revision", "Specific Aims", and "Top Tips". Below the menu is a row of five article cards. Each card has a small image at the top, a date, a title, and a "Continue Reading" link. The first card shows a red and blue pie chart with the date "April 21, 2020" and the title "FIGURES: WHY YOU NEED THEM AND HOW TO MAKE". The second card shows a white stick figure with an arrow pointing right, with the date "April 14, 2020" and the title "REVIEWER COMMENTS: DECIDING WHAT TO". The third card shows a stack of three books (red, blue, and orange) with the date "April 6, 2020" and the title "MUST-READ EDITING BOOKS". The fourth card shows a yellow cartoon character with a wide smile, with the date "March 30, 2020" and the title "OVERCOMING WRITER'S BLOCK". The fifth card is partially visible on the right edge. There are small white arrows pointing left and right on either side of the article cards.

Write Better Proposals

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