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Scientific Editing and Research Communication Core

Formatting Tips for Making Your Grant Reader Friendly

Grant pages before and after reformatting. "Wall-of-Text" Layout: Problems include a lack of space separating sections, a lack of clear compartmentalization of information (including separation of figure legends from the corresponding images), and interruption of the main text by figure legends (highlighted in yellow). Reader-Friendly Layout: White space provides breaks for the reader, heading placement clarifies how information is organized, figure legends are associated with the relevant figure, and figure legends do not interrupt the main text.

Have you ever opened a grant file and found yourself overwhelmed by the amount of text squeezed onto the page or missing guideposts indicating what type of information to expect? Have you found yourself losing focus as your reading is continuously interrupted by graphics or wayward figure legends? Here are a few tips for how to make your grant proposal more inviting for busy reviewers.

Use white space strategically. A lack of white space (a wall of text) can exhaust reviewers before they begin to read. Margins and gaps that separate blocks of text make it easier to access written material because they provide a visual structure (Bang Wong, 2011).

- Leave space between sections, subsections, and paragraphs.
- If space allows, leave larger gaps between the sections that are least related. This will emphasize their differences (Bang Wong, 2010).
- If space allows, make margins larger than the NIH limit of 0.5 inches. This can help alleviate the "wall-of-text" feeling; even 0.75-inch margins can make a big difference.
- Use tabs for any indentation instead of manually putting in spaces (this minimizes errors).

Use headings and subheaings to compartmentalize ideas effectively. Headings and subheadings serve as guideposts, helping readers understand how information throughout the document is related. Each heading and subheading should briefly convey the main point of the relevant section or paragraph.

- Use distinct formatting to allow readers to differentiate between levels of headings and subheadings. Examples of formatting for headings at decreasing levels:
  - **FIRST-LEVEL HEADING**
  - **Second-level heading**
  - Third-level heading
- Be consistent in how you format headings at the same level (e.g., for the Research Strategy of NIH Research (R) applications, format Significance, Innovation, and Approach the same way).

Keep graphics (figures plus their legends and tables) from interrupting the text. When a graphic takes up the full width of a page, the reader must "jump over" this information to find the re-entry point.

- If a graphic must span the entire page, put it at the top or bottom of the page, or at the end of the section.
- Consider formatting multi-panel figures so that they are tall rather than wide and take up no more than half the width of the page, allowing the text to flow around them (hence, no interruption).
- Make figure legends and table footnotes the same width as the figure. This is easiest to do by placing them in a text box with the corresponding graphic (see below).

Use text boxes to keep graphics and the associated text together, and to allow text to flow around them. (To visualize the tips below, see Word Tips – Embedding Figures.)

- Select a spot near the text associated with the graphic to insert the text.
- Select "**Insert >> Text Box >> Text Box**" and draw a square of roughly the size needed to accommodate the graphic and the associated text.
- Enable text wrapping by selecting "**Layout >> Wrap Text >> Tight**" (or "**Square**" if space allows).
- For tables, type/paste in the title, then the table, and then the footnotes. Make the tables text elements rather than using a graphics program so that you can adjust the text size for consistency

Upcoming Opportunities

Have a question about writing grants or research articles? Contact us and we will attempt to answer it in a future newsletter.

NIH Request for Information on Proposed Simplified Review Framework for NIH Research Project Grant Applications
NIH is soliciting public input on a proposed plan to revise and simplify the peer review framework for research project grant (RPG) applications. The goal is to facilitate the mission of scientific peer review by identifying the strongest, highest-impact research. Comment on the proposed plan through March 10, 2023.
More information

OVPR Interdisciplinary Scholars – Request For Proposals-LOI
LOI due March 21, 2023
Applications are sought for collaborative OVPR Interdisciplinary Scholars proposals with awards up to $220k for 18 months. Successful proposals must focus on UI areas of interdisciplinary strength that have significant societal impact. The goal is to enable teams of researchers to build on existing strengths to achieve significant growth in the area of focus. Full proposals are by invitation only, and are due May 31, 2023. Anticipated awards for Spring 2023 are up to ten invitations for full proposals and up to five awards.
View the RFP and apply.

NIH Request for Information on Re-envisioning NIH-supported Postdoctoral Training
Recent data from NSF suggest that postdoc numbers are declining. NIH would like to hear the perspectives of postdocs and those who interact with them on the following: roles and responsibilities of the academic postdoc; fundamental challenges to recruitment and retention; potential improvements to existing NIH policies, programs, or resources; and external resources or approaches that could inform NIH efforts to improve the postdoctoral training ecosystem.
More information
Respond by April 14, 2023.

Hardin Open Workshop: Data Sharing and Publication
Apr 17, 1:00-2:00pm (Zoom)
You've received funding for a project, and your research funder expects you to share the data. Or perhaps you are working on an article, and the journal requires you to share your data. In this workshop, we'll walk through the process of preparing data for sharing or publication, important decisions to make, and ways to enable your data to have a broader impact.
Registration

NIH Center for Scientific Review (CSR): Early Career Reviewer (ECR) Program
This program aims to help early career scientists (e.g., Assistant Professor or equivalent) become more competitive as grant applicants through first-hand experience with peer review and to enrich and

with that in other tables ([Frank, 2018](#)).
- For figures, paste the full image (single or multi-panel) into the text box and then paste the legend below it. Keeping the figures and legends separate elements rather than embedding the legend in the figure will enable you to adjust the text size for consistency with that in other figures.
- Adjust the size of the text box to match the width of the graphic.
- Consider auto-positioning the graphic on the page by selecting "**Layout >> Position**" and choosing from the options; the position can then be tweaked if necessary.
- To remove the outline of the text box (if desired), select the box and go to "**Format >> Format Object…**" and for "**Outline**" select "**No line**."

Good luck with your grant writing and formatting!
Chris Blaumueller and the SERCC Team

Full References for Resources:

- Wong, B. [Negative space](#). *Nat Methods* 8, 5 (2011).
- Wong, B. [Gestalt principles (Part 1)](#). *Nat Methods* 7, 863 (2010).
- Frank, D. J. (2018). [How to write a research manuscript](#). *Current Protocols Essential Laboratory Techniques*,16, e20. doi:10.1002/cpet.20 First published: 24 April 2018

diversify CSR's pool of trained reviewers. Eligibility criteria apply.
[More information](#)

Grant Writing Webinar Series: Writing a Competitive Application
Sponsored by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS)
This webinar recording discusses how to acquire and structure the feedback needed to develop a strong application, effective practices for grant writing and revising, and the NIH funding decision process.
[View recording](#)

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