



How to Critique a Proposal

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slides courtesy of Janet Stocks with input from others

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The benefits of peer critique of your proposal

- Who

- Someone who knows your discipline (a specialist)
- Someone who doesn't (a generalist)

- Why

- A fresh/objective perspective
- Discussion of/clarification of ideas
- Additional literature suggestions

- We are often better at evaluating other people's work than our own

Benefits to you of critiquing others' proposals

- Learn something you didn't already know
- Obtain perspective on the structure of a proposal
- Get tips about how to present arguments
- Show that you are a good citizen
 - As a member of a community of scholars, you are the peers in peer-review

What to critique



- Content of Proposal
- Intended Audience
- Presentation
- Rhetoric
 - Exposition
 - Persuasion
 - Credentialing

What to critique (what panels look at)

- Content of proposal

- Research question/ statement of the problem/ program objectives

- Significance of research question

- Existing state of the field and gaps (literature)

- Methods

- Expected products/ outcomes/ contribution

- Assessment/ dissemination



What to critique (cont.)

- Intended audience

- Is this the right funding agency for this proposal?

- Does the proposal address the agency's needs?

- Has the researcher made appropriate contact with the agency?



What to critique (cont.)

● Presentation

○ Is the writing clear and concise?

○ Is the reader's interest engaged throughout?

○ Are you persuaded that this is worth funding?

○ Are all the elements presented logically and consistently?

○ Are there appropriate transitions between concepts and sections?

○ Does the writer present appropriate credentials?

● Does the writer have the background/training to be uniquely suited to this research

How NIH panels work



- Proposals are reviewed by a primary reviewer and a secondary and tertiary
- As a reviewer, you will have 5-10 as primary, same amount as secondary and a few tertiary
- You will be expected to write critiques before the panel as a primary reviewer
- During the discussion, secondary reviewer will keep notes



The attitude of a peer critique

- Constructive criticism (be supportive, not brutal)
- Attempt to paraphrase main points (to see if they are clear)
- Dialogue /Ask questions for clarification
- Suggest additional literature if possible
- Probe for methodological details
- Point out gaps



How to deliver a critique

- Remember that this is not YOUR proposal (don't expect that all your suggestions will be taken)
- Your opinion is valuable, but assume that the proposal author knows a lot too
- Therefore, tone is important—we are all in this game together!



How to receive a critique

- Be grateful that the person took the time to take your proposal seriously
- Take all feedback into consideration but make choices based on what YOU believe is best
- Come back to the feedback a day or two later and consider it again