

Writing for the Peer Review

The grant application peer review is the single most important event that influences whether your proposal will be funded.

What is the Peer Review?

Process through which many competitive grant proposals are assessed.

Who are these peer reviewers?

Your professional peers; Experienced and knowledgeable in the type of grant being read

What is the scoring rubric (or selection criteria)?

The standards used to evaluate the quality of your proposal/ same standards for writing

How is the proposal actually scored by reviewers?

- Reviewers are trained on the meaning, interpretation, and use of criteria.
- Each component criterion is worth a certain number of points. Example:

Need for Project			20 Points Max	
Poor	Weak	Adequate	Very Good	Excellent
0-4	5-8	9-12	13-16	17-20

- Scoring requires a significant amount of subjectivity.

What other factors influence the scoring?

Although the rubric criteria may be clear, *different readers may have divergent scores for one proposal.*

- Despite conflict of interest disclosure, reader may have some bias – either for or against.
- Different reviewers may focus on different sections of rubric.
- Reviewers may be influenced by the budget or items in the appendices.
- Reviewer might give points for fresh, innovative solution to problem ... even if not well-written.
- Reviewer might give high points for lots of need, despite poorly written proposal.
- Some do not give enough time and attention to reading the proposal.
- The reviewer's experience with reviewing proposals.
- The reviewer may have credentials, but insufficient background knowledge in the program.
- Some are easy graders – start with points and only deduct if response not found.
- Some are highly critical – start with zero and earn points.
- Some are pressured, tired, reading late at night.
- Luck of the draw!

How can we impress the most critical reviewers? ... 3 Impressions

1. First Impression - Initial Scan Encounter

- Appealing, attractive, proposal (white space, friendly font)
- Table of Contents - accurate
- Organized by required components (Headings, subheadings)

2. Second Impression – One-on-One Reading and Rating Encounter

- Write for most critical reader AND for most pressured, least attentive, late night reader
- Proposal must align with intent/purpose of grant – DO NOT make grant fit what you want.
- Beware reviewer's potential biases...write them away!
- Follow the rules! Structure proposal according to guidelines and scoring criteria.
- Align # pages for each component to proportion of points
 - 100 pts possible, 40 pp. max, 25 pts for "Project Design" = 10 pages (approx.)
- Highlight (italicize, boldface) key words from selection criteria (guides reviewers)
- Assume readers do NOT know your schools, district, and state (federal grants)
- Anticipate reviewer's questions when articulating rationale
- Ensure timeline matches the funding cycle.

3. Third Impression - Panel Review Encounter

- **A reviewer may be your biggest advocate or worst enemy**
- The compelling, convincing project will draw advocate(s)
- Get passionate! Write with passion, determination, energy. You are writing for a higher, more noble cause...to better the lives of students (teachers, parents, etc.) The genuine commitment must come through.
- Essential – CONSISTENCY AND ALIGNMENT of content throughout
- Most critical reviewer is most powerful, most persuasive. Scores are often changed.
- Paginate every page (Make it easy for reviewers to discuss a section.)

Writing for the Peer Review...

- **BE KIND TO YOUR READER...and hope your reader will be kind to you.**
- Write clearly, concisely, but convey commitment, determination...
- Read for Readability...easy to read and interesting to read.
 - The reviewer should NEVER have to read twice to get the meaning.
 - Shorten sentences, simplify structure.
 - Pages should NOT be solid text... use tables, charts, bullets, graphics, timelines, etc. (*Breaks up narrative monotony, adds meaning, easy on eyes*)
 - Use headings, subheadings, bold and underline key terms
 - Choose type font with serifs (Times New Roman) – easier to read
 - Page content aligned to the left – easier to read
 - Use active voice, action phrases
 - Avoid passive openers – There are; There is; It is
- Proofread, edit, revise...
 - Improve overall readability, flow, and presentation.
 - Spelling, punctuation, grammar, typos
 - Consistent voice, format, and style.
- Read for overall clarity, consistency, and alignment throughout proposal
 - Transitions, Sequencing, Chronology
 - Clear relevance of ideas to each other and to grant aims/purposes
 - Components aligned and consistent – Need addressed by activities, measured by objectives, assessed by evaluation, funded by budget
 - Sound assumptions, supported arguments, concrete and specific documentation
 - Read introductory sentence in each paragraph - MOST IMPORTANT. This may be all some reviewers read.
- Simulate the review
 - Have someone review against scoring rubric and critique
 - Have someone read the proposal who does not know your project. Is it clear and understandable?

Perspective from an experienced and critical peer reviewer...

I am a very critical reader, but very careful and thorough. I would advocate for a proposal only when my heart was captured by the passionate and determined narrative, written with a clear and believable commitment to solving the problem.

Recommendation: Get experience as a grant reviewer!