WRITING STYLE GUIDELINES

This document provides general guidance about preparing a review critique. This is a list of guidelines and suggestions created by NIAID’s Scientific Review Program to help the reviewer prepare a thorough and well-written review critique.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- The critique template is used to organize the reviewer’s thoughts about an application or proposal. The Review Critique Template breaks down the five main review criteria—Significance, Innovation, Investigators, Approach, and Environment—into bulleted “Strengths” and “Weaknesses” sections. Even though the template is bulleted, please use full sentences and place the comment in context.

  Fully explain what the perceived strength or weakness is, what element (i.e., aim, experiment or strategy) it is related to and why that is a strength or weakness. For example, a sentence or two sets the context, three or four sentences describe the strength or weakness, and a few sentences justify why it is a strength or weakness. Thus, one bullet could be ten lines or more.

- If a reviewer assigns a score of “2” or worse to any criteria, appropriate weaknesses must be noted on the critique.

- If there are no weaknesses to list for a criterion, state “No weaknesses are noted.”

- Do not repeat descriptive information from the application unless it is part of the evaluation.

- To help the SRO and the SRP technical writers in their preparation of an application’s summary statement, please run a spell check on the finished review critique.

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Reviewers should adhere to the following style guidelines as they write their critiques:

Weaknesses should be stated in impersonal, objective terms.

- **Instead of:** Dr. So-and-so claims/alleges/expects us to believe that ...
  
  **Use:** The applicants state/imply that ...

- **Instead of:** Dr. So-and-so has done nothing worthwhile in the last ten years.
  
  **Use:** Dr. So-and-so has made only limited/minor contributions to the field of X during the past ten years.

- **Instead of:** Dr. So-and-so is a very young investigator with a poor publication record.
  
  **Use:** Dr. So-and-so is a young investigator with a limited/minor publication record.
• **Use:** Dr. So-and-so is a junior investigator with limited/no publications or track record in the field of X to date.

• **Instead of:** The applicants have taken a good idea and absolutely ruined it.

• **Use:** Although the idea has merit, the proposed research is unlikely to succeed due to many problems of experimental design.

• **Instead of:** Dr. So-and-so fails to appreciate that ... Dr. So-and-so has neglected to ... Dr. So-and-so failed to address ... (and on and on, with every criticism of the application as a whole directly imputed to the PI).

• **Use:** The applicants fail to appreciate or do not appear to have considered ...

Make absolute statements only when they are truly warranted.

• **Instead of:** The Principal Investigator has no experience in conducting clinical trials.

• **Use:** The Principal Investigator has insufficient (or limited) experience in conducting clinical trials.

• **Instead of:** The investigators have no publications in the field of influenza vaccines.

• **Use:** No publications by the investigators on influenza vaccines are listed in the application.

• **Or:** The investigators apparently have not published in the field of influenza vaccines.

Appropriate absolutes could include:

• No women will be included in the trials, as the subjects will all be male military recruits in the Royal Thai Air Force.

• Dr. X is not listed among the conference speakers. (For example, there is a list, and it clearly does not include Dr. X.)

Use “application” and “proposal” appropriately.

• The words **application and applicant refer to a grant**; the words **proposal and offeror generally refer to a contract.** To get a contract, **offerors** submit **proposals,** which also may discuss “proposed research” or “propose to...”

• To get a grant, **applicants** submit **applications,** which discuss “proposed research”, contain “a proposal to study...”, or the applicants may “propose to ...”

• In writing the **de novo** portions of Summary Statements (e.g. the Resume and SRO notes), do not refer to a grant **application** as a “proposal,” although you may refer to the “research plan” in the generic sense.

**MISCILLANEOUS ITEMS**

• Italicize appropriate terms such as *in vitro* and *in vivo.*

• Capitalize the terms “aim” and “project” only in reference to a specific number. For example, use “Aim 1” or “this aim.”
In the critique of a multiproject grant application, do not refer to the Program Director (PD), a Project Leader (PL), or a Core Leader (CL) as the Principal Investigator (PI).