

CHAPTER 18

HOW TO CREATE A COMPELLING, INFORMATIVE TITLE FOR YOUR PROPOSAL

Application Guide instructions pertinent to creating a title: “NIH and other PHS agencies limit title ... length to 81 characters, including the spaces between words and punctuation. Titles in excess of 81 characters will be truncated. A “new” application must have a different title from any other PHS project with the same PD/PI. A “resubmission” or “renewal” application should normally have the same title as the previous grant or application. If the specific aims of the project have significantly changed, choose a new title. A “revision” application must have the same title as the currently funded grant.”

We want to clarify one part of the instructions that appear in the text box, above: in our opinion, renewal applications should *always* have a different title than the grant that supports the current period of investigation. *Of course* the aims will be different. What will remain constant is the number of the grant. The reason that the title *must* change on renewal applications will become apparent from the rest of this chapter.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

The title is critically important, because it will likely be the first thing related to the content of your proposal that a reviewer will see. Therefore, the title gives the first impression that a reviewer will have of your application — and we all know that you get only one chance to make a good first impression. The title is also important, because it will be one of the things that will be used by staff at the Center for Scientific Review to assign your application to a specific Scientific Review Group for evaluation. Thus, it behooves you to make your title as interesting / informative as you can.

TIP: Your title should emphasize the payoff – the product of the research.

An especially important point is that your title should emphasize what the research will produce, i.e., the payoff of the research, not the process that will yield that product. You should never offer a generic, process-oriented title like, ‘Investigations of *Bacillus megaterium*.’ Applicants often write such a title because they have misinterpreted the instructions in the text box, above, and mistakenly think that the title must be sufficiently generic to apply equally well to future renewal applications. Rather, as noted earlier, your title should immediately convey to the agency and its reviewers what the mission-relevant payoff from the research will be. Thus, the objective of your application and the description of your expected contribution from the significance subsection of *Research Strategy* section will be particularly helpful in developing your title.