

CHAPTER 10

RESEARCH STRATEGY SECTION: SIGNIFICANCE (INCLUDING RIGOR OF THE PRIOR RESEARCH) AND INNOVATION SUBSECTIONS

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

TIP: Your commitment to writing the Significance and Innovation subsections should be commensurate with the importance that they have in the review of your grant proposal. Each is a core-review criterion. In other words, together these two subsections contribute 2/5ths – 40% – of your score.

The relative importance of these two subsections cannot be overemphasized. *They are where reviewers will look to find the majority of the information that they need to evaluate the SIGNIFICANCE and INNOVATION core-review criteria.*

In the past, before there was a separate Innovation subsection, applicants didn't have to draw a sharp distinction between innovation and significance. That is no longer the case, now that each has its own subsection and they are adjacent in the application. Reviewers can easily be put off if there is overlap/redundancy between the two. To avoid that trap, let's begin by generically defining each of these two core-review criteria:

SIGNIFICANCE: the impact that something will have on some other thing

INNOVATION: a new and substantively different way of considering/addressing something, which opens new horizons

If those definitions are kept in mind, and each is used in concert with its purpose in the application (see details, below), you should be able to make the two subsections distinctly different.

SIGNIFICANCE SUBSECTION

An important part of our proposal-writing strategy is to gradually ratchet up detail as the reviewer reads farther into the application. This is where you start to do that. The idea is to get the reader "hooked" on the conceptual, exciting parts of the proposal to the extent that s/he will want to read the details that are presented later. The description of what reviewers will consider under the SIGNIFICANCE core-review criterion (see text box, below) will help inform how you write this part of your application. The subsection is meant to provide new information and citations that will extend and validate the assertions you made in the first paragraph of the Specific Aims section, as well as the statement of positive impact you wrote at the end of that section.

SIGNIFICANCE Core Review Criterion (http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer_review_process.htm): "Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field? Is the prior research that serves as the key support for the proposed project rigorous? If the aims of the project are achieved, how will scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice be improved? How will successful completion of the aims change the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field?"