

CHAPTER 10

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

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

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 Factor 1. Importance of the Research.*

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 to each other 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 that 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 they will want to read the details that are presented later. The description of what reviewers will consider under the significance part of Factor 1 (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 (<https://grants.nih.gov/policy-and-compliance/policy-topics/peer-review/simplifying-review/framework>): "Evaluate the importance of the proposed research in the context of current scientific challenges and opportunities, either for advancing knowledge within the field, or more broadly. Assess whether the application addresses an important gap in knowledge in the field, would solve a critical problem, or create a valuable conceptual or technical advance. Evaluate the rationale for undertaking the study, the rigor of the scientific background for the work (e.g., prior literature and/or preliminary data) and whether the scientific background justifies the proposed study."