

How to Write a Specific Aims Page

Karen L. Dodson, MBA

Office of Faculty Affairs

Washington University School of Medicine

St. Louis, Missouri

September 25, 2018



Washington University in St. Louis

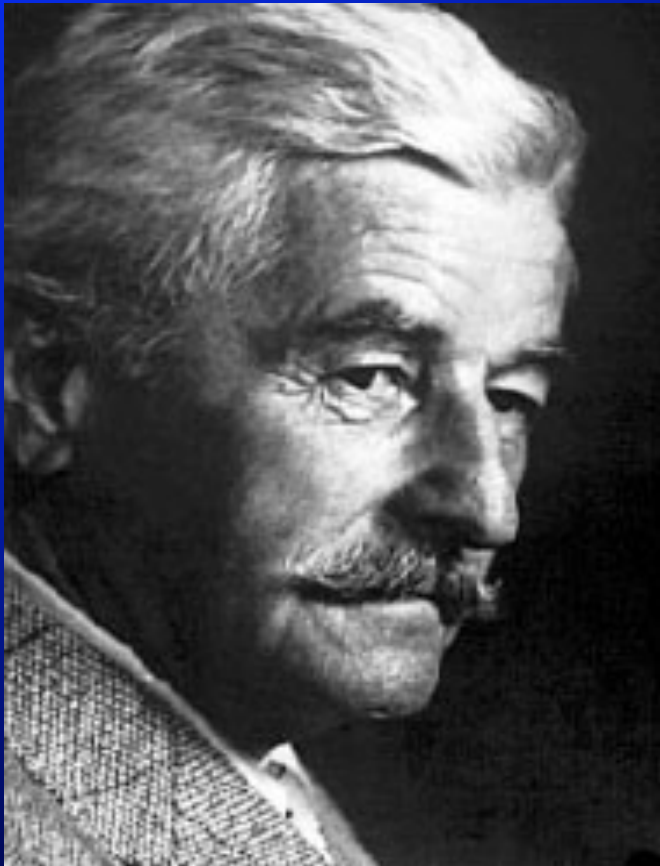
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Who Am I?

- ❖ Experienced biomedical journalist:
 - ❖ Editorial Manager of *JAMA Otolaryngology – Head & Neck Surgery* (JAMA Network) since January 1, 2016
 - ❖ Managing Editor of the *American Journal of Physiology-Endocrinology and Metabolism* since January 1, 2001
 - ❖ Former manager at Mosby, now Elsevier, in the journals division
- ❖ Editor of several grant proposals that include funded NIH mechanisms
- ❖ Instructor, *Grantsmanship and Scientific Writing and Publishing*, Clinical Research Training Center
- ❖ Manager of Professional Development and developer of Academic Publishing Services, Office of Faculty Affairs, Washington University School of Medicine
- ❖ Undergraduate education in biology and communications; Executive MBA, Washington University, 2014
- ❖ Former newspaper reporter

An important element for success
is
clear and concise communication.

To Demonstrate:
William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway



Faulkner: The Artist



“Loving all of it even while he had to hate some of it because he knows now that you don’t love because: you love despite; not for the virtues, but despite the faults.”

Hemingway: The Journalist



“All you have to do is
write one true
sentence. Write the
truest sentence that
you know.”

Rebekah S. Rasooly, PhD

Program Director

NIDDK/NIH

Grant Writing for Success

Hallmarks of an Outstanding Grant Application

- ❖ Strong significance for an important problem in public health: IMPACT is high
- ❖ High degree of novelty and innovation
- ❖ Strong track record of a well qualified applicant with compelling publications
- ❖ Clear rationale
- ❖ Relevant and supportive preliminary data
- ❖ Clear and focused approach that provides unambiguous results
- ❖ Careful attention to details: spelling, punctuation, grammar, fonts, clarity of data, error bars, spelling, etc.

Common Reasons Cited for a Weak Application

- ❖ Lack of or weak impact
- ❖ Significance not obvious or weak
- ❖ Too ambitious, lacking focus, too many unrelated aims
- ❖ Unclear or flawed hypothesis or rationale
- ❖ Applicant track record weak or lacking appropriate expertise
- ❖ Feasibility unsupported
- ❖ Approach flawed
- ❖ Poor writing and lots of errors

Fungai Chanetsa, PhD, MPH

Scientific Review Officer

Peer Review at the NIH

What Reviewers Look for in Grant Applications

- ❖ Significance and impact
- ❖ Exciting ideas
- ❖ Clarity
- ❖ Ideas they can understand – don't assume too much
- ❖ Realistic aims and timelines – don't be overly ambitious
- ❖ Brevity with things that everybody knows
- ❖ Noted limitations of the study
- ❖ A clean, well-written application

Common Problems in Applications

- ❖ Lack of new or original ideas
- ❖ Absence of an acceptable scientific rationale
- ❖ Lack of experience in the essential methodology
- ❖ Questionable reasoning in experimental approach
- ❖ Uncritical approach
- ❖ Diffuse, superficial, or unfocused research plan
- ❖ Lack of sufficient experimental detail
- ❖ Lack of knowledge of published relevant work
- ❖ Unrealistically large or overly ambitious amount of work
- ❖ Uncertainty concerning future directions

It's a Jungle Out There



So many funding opportunities!

So much competition!

So much pressure!

Other important elements for success?

A dedicated, informed, and efficient grant-writing **team**

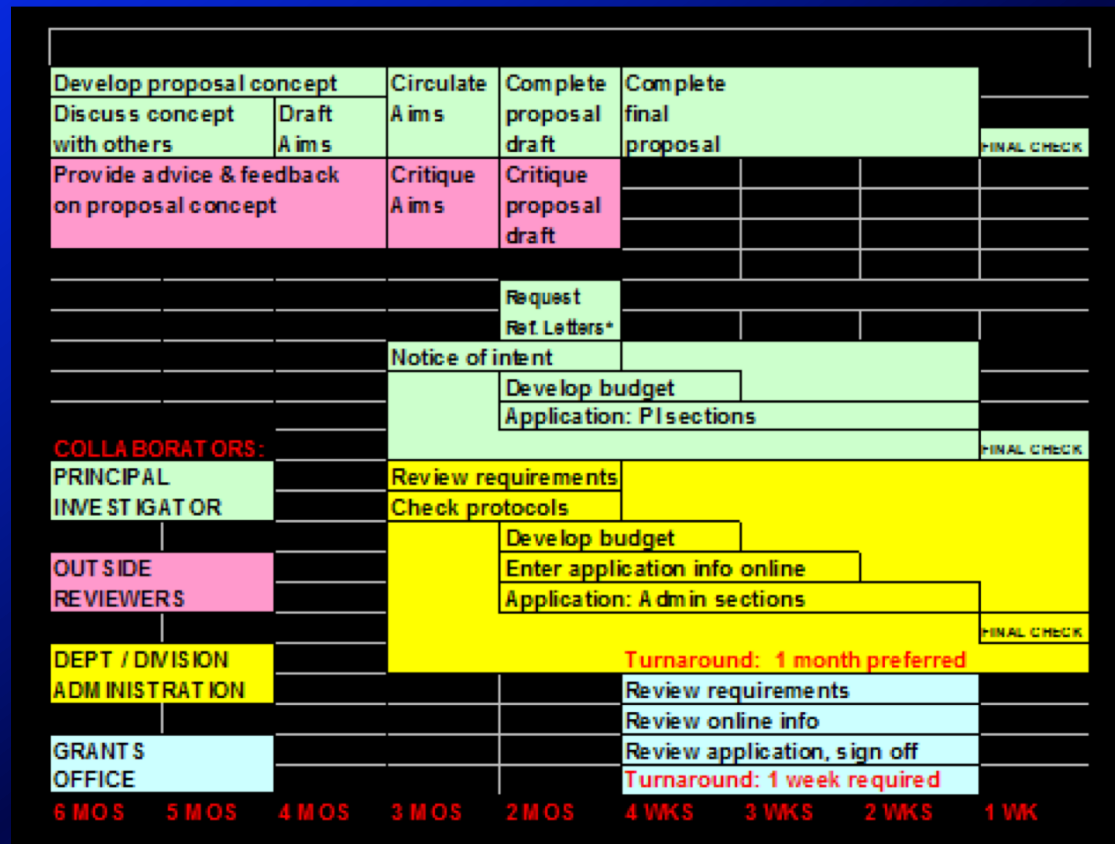
A proactive **plan**

And well-developed **tools!**

Your Grant-Writing Team?

- ❖ Your investigative team
- ❖ Trusted lay readers who will provide honest feedback
- ❖ Writing assistants
- ❖ Coordinator (e.g., to monitor deadlines)

Your Plan?



Your Tools?

❖ Templates

- ◆ Specific Aims template (with the **Overall Impact** statement as the closing paragraph)
- ◆ Grant proposal template and guidebook
 - ◆ With current specifications depending on mechanism
 - ◆ Reference letter templates
 - ◆ Other resources (including links to important online information)