

Template for Writing the Specific Aims Page of an NIH Grant Proposal¹

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The Specific Aims page of an NIH grant proposal contains several key components. The sequence of those components can differ, but the components are the same and should appear in the narrative. To see a short video that shows two different sequences of these components in two different proposals (and to see the two proposals themselves) go to the following website:

<http://www.northwestern.edu/climb/resources/written-communication/aims-pages-part-1-the-rhetorical-pattern-of-introductions-in-aims-pages.html>

To develop a powerful Specific Aims page that covers all of the key components, ask and answer the following key questions:

General context & significance: What is the big picture for the research? Why is it important?

Narrowing context: What is known and accepted in your research area?

Your research contribution: Has your previous work contributed? How?

Complication: What is the problem, roadblock, unknown?

Long-term goal: What final “big result” will the research help achieve? Not today, but down the road?

Specific narrow research goal: What is the specific goal of the proposed research in this application?

Summary of research—path to the hypothesis: How does previous research (yours, others’) lead to the overall hypothesis that the aims are designed to test?

Hypothesis: How would you explicitly state what you believe to be the answer to the complication/problem/unknown that you’ve raised?

Qualifications: What makes you (or your team) the right person (or team) to undertake this research?

Specific aims statements:

- Is each aim an elaboration of an element or elements of the logic flow of your overall hypothesis?
- Does each aim have its own “sub hypothesis”, either explicitly stated or implicitly clear? (The aims must be logically connected to the rest of the Aims page—that is achieved by having the aims posit “sub hypotheses” of the proposal’s central hypothesis, which was formulated on the basis of your preliminary data and prior work by you and others).
- Is each aim independent of the others so the failure of one does not invalidate the others?

¹ Notes are based on two presentations: <http://www.northwestern.edu/climb/resources/written-communication/aims-pages-part-1-the-rhetorical-pattern-of-introductions-in-aims-pages.html> and <http://www.northwestern.edu/climb/resources/written-communication/aims-pages-part-2-specific-aims.html>

- Does each aim have a specific, ideal, concrete outcome (in other words, what will the success of the aim show us or teach us)? You can test the independence of the aims by stating what each outcome would ideally be.

Conclusion: Does the conclusion point to the novel nature of the research and the broader impact it might have? (e.g., *“The proposed research is innovative because to date.... Collectively, we expect the outcomes of these experiments will greatly add to our understanding of....”*).