Personal Statement, Relevant Background and Future Goals (PRBFG)
statement

PEER RESPONSE GUIDELINES

Instructions to Peer Response Readers: You are being asked to provide constructive feedback. Your responsibility is not to copy edit, rewrite, ... instead, you are being asked to put yourself in the shoes of a reviewer and to provide your own personal reaction to the proposal. The writer wants an honest assessment of how you react to their writing. Remember that writers are opening themselves up to constructive comments - an uncomfortable thing for them to do. Therefore, be sure that your comments are honest but constructive. Your comments are about your reaction to the proposal, not an evaluation of whether the proposal is good or bad. As an example, comment #1 below is appropriate whereas comment #2 is not:

1. You mention your involvement in “Broader Impacts” several times in your personal statement but I wasn’t convinced that you were actually interested in those activities.
2. Although you mention your involvement in “Broader Impacts” several times in your personal statement, it is clear that you aren’t actually interested in those activities.

Instructions to Writers: Your Peer Review Readers have committed to providing you with their honest personal reaction to your proposal. They are not judging your proposal. Make sure that you listen to their comments with this in mind and do your best to avoid being defensive about your writing. After receiving comment #1 above, #1 and #2 below are appropriate reactions whereas #3 and #4 are not:

1. “Thanks, I’ll think about how to make that point more clearly.”
2. “Can you point to a specific place where my interest seemed to you to be less than what it could be?”
3. “If you had read more carefully, you would have seen that I mentioned my interest in paragraphs three and five.”
4. “My major professor, who was an NSF reviewer, thinks this statement is great as is.”

Schedule for Small Group Peer Response

(5 minutes) introduction/setup (assign time keeping responsibilities)
(10 minutes) Readers take turns telling the writer their personal reaction to the draft
(5 min or less) WRITERS review READERS’ feedback & ask for clarification if necessary

REPEAT LAST TWO STEPS FOR EACH WRITER

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**TONE** - The tone of the PRBFG should be conversational. It should be neither flowery or a dry recitation of information.

1. *If this were something someone told you at a cocktail party, would you want to continue talking with that person to find out more?*
2. *Identify (by underlining) two or three passages in the statement where you found yourself particularly interested in what the writer was saying. What is interesting about these points?*
3. *As a reader, did you feel at all uncomfortable that the writer was either overstating or understating things?*

**MOTIVATION** - One of the primary goals of this statement is for the writer to explain his/her motivation in pursuing a graduate degree.

*As a reader, do you feel that you could now explain to someone else the writer’s motivation for pursuing a graduate degree?*

**CONTENT** – This statement is by definition, very personal. Therefore, it is often difficult for writers to be objective about their experiences.

- *As a reader, were there any events/experiences that were mentioned for which you were unclear why they were relevant?*
- *As a reader, were there any events/experiences that were mentioned that you felt should be elaborated or emphasized more strongly?*

**INTELLECTUAL ROLE** - Not all research experiences are equivalent. Reviewers are interested in knowing what the writer’s role was on each project. In some cases the writer might have been a technician doing what was asked but otherwise may have had no impact on the research. In other instances the writer might have helped with data analysis, might have been responsible for some or all of the project design, and/or may have written some or all of a manuscript summarizing the research.

- *As a reader, were there any research experiences for which the writer’s role was unclear to you?*
PERSONAL GROWTH - Prior research experiences are important not only as opportunities to learn new skills and knowledge, but more importantly as opportunities to learn more about oneself and one’s motivation.

• As a reader, how would you describe the personal importance of each of these research experiences

BROADER IMPACTS - NSF wants all researchers to be proactive in communicating science and the importance of research to the public.

Based solely on the Personal Statement, would you conclude that the writer has:

• No experience with broader impacts,
• Participated in, but not really modified, an existing broader impacts program,
• Participated in and modified an existing broader impacts program, or
• Developed and implemented a new broader impacts activity.

Based solely on the Personal Statement, would you conclude that the writer is:

• Uninterested in participating in Broader Impacts activities,
• Willing to participate in Broader Impacts activities, or
• Enthusiastic about participating in Broader Impacts activities.
GRADUATE RESEARCH STATEMENT

COMPELLING

NSF reviewers will have very little time to read this proposal. First impressions are, therefore, their only impression. It would be helpful to the writer to hear your own person first impression.

After a single quick read of the Research Project, what adjective would you use to describe the proposed research?

BIG PICTURE

Your NSF reviewers are unlikely to have research interests close to the writer’s. Therefore, the Research Project description must be written explicitly to appeal to a broad audience. Primarily, this means not getting into the specifics of the project too quickly.

- At the conclusion of the first paragraph had the writer grabbed your attention?
- Were you interested in reading more about this project?

Reviewers strongly prefer hypothesis-driven research.

- As a reader, what competing hypotheses do you think the writer is testing in this project?

FEASIBILITY - Reviewers need to feel confident that the proposed project can be completed successfully by the writer in a reasonable period of time.

- As a reader, were there any parts of the proposal where you began to wonder whether the writer had the necessary skill and/or resources to conduct the research?
- As a reader, were you convinced that the study system is ideal for testing the stated hypotheses?

ORIGINALITY - It is often difficult for reviewers to determine whether or not the proposed research project is the intellectual work of the writer or reflects primarily the ideas of the major professor.

- Circle those parts of the proposal that convince you that the ideas expressed in this proposal are the writer’s.