

Specific Aims

Purpose: The purpose of the specific aims is to describe concisely and realistically what the proposed research is intended to accomplish.

Recommended Length: The recommended length of the specific aims is one page.

Content: A strong grant application is driven by a strong, solid hypothesis with clear research objectives. The specific aims are a formal statement of the objectives and milestones of the research project towards testing the hypothesis. At its core, the typical, successful grant application has a testable hypothesis in an area of high interest. It includes a concise series of specific aims that address the central hypothesis. Consider whether the aims address interesting and significant issues and whether they are hypothesis-based.

Suggestions:

1. Generally, the Specific Aims section should begin with a brief narrative describing the long-term goals of the project and the hypothesis guiding the research. This is followed by a numbered list of the Aims.
2. **State the hypothesis clearly.** Make sure it is understandable, testable and adequately supported by citations in the Background and by data in the Preliminary Results Sections. Be sure to explain how the results to be obtained and used to test the hypothesis.
3. List your aims and all the experiments that will be done to support each aim. Keep in mind that the experiments support the aims, and the aims test the hypothesis. Have no more than one or two sets of experiments for each aim. If you need more, reorganize.
4. Show that the specific aims are logical and attainable within the proposed time frame.
5. *Be as brief and specific as possible.* For clarity, each aim should consist of only one sentence. Use a brief paragraph under each aim if detail is needed. Most successful applications have 2-4 specific aims.
6. Don't be overly ambitious. A small, focused project is generally better received than a diffuse, multifaceted project.
7. Be certain that all aims are related. Have someone read them for clarity and cohesiveness.
8. Focus on aims that have good supporting preliminary data and scientific expertise.
9. Consider the following when writing the Specific Aims section.
 - A. List each Specific Aim as a bold header.
 - B. Under the header, list experiments you plan to accomplish, and briefly state how the aim will help prove your hypothesis.
 - C. Write this section for all peer reviewers, the experts and non-experts in your field, since they will all read it. Use terms a broad audience can understand.
 - D. Review and rewrite your draft Specific Aims as you work out the details of your Research Plan.