



CASAA-UNM

# Writing the Background and Significance Section

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Normal length: 3-5 pages is often what is recommended

## **B. Background and Significance**

Briefly sketch the background leading to the present application, critically evaluate existing knowledge, and specifically identify the gaps that the project is intended to fill. State concisely the importance and health relevance of the research described in this application by relating the specific aims to the broad, long-term objectives. If the aims of the application are achieved, state how scientific knowledge or clinical practice will be advanced. Describe the effect of these studies on the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services or preventative interventions that drive this field. *Two to three pages are recommended.*

# Continuity

- There should be a smooth, continuous flow across sections:
  - Abstract: Engage the reviewer
  - Specific Aims: What will be accomplished?
  - **Background**: What has been done so far?  
**Significance**: Why is this research important?
  - Preliminary Studies: What have *you* done so far?
  - Research Plan: What will you do and why?

# Two Components

- Two distinct but inter-related purposes:
- ***Background:*** Thoroughly review (others') research to date relevant to your proposal
- ***Significance:*** Establish why the proposed research matters, making an important contribution of new knowledge

# Which Comes First?

- *Background* provides the context for significance and shows gaps in knowledge
- *Significance* raises interest and provides the context for organizing and understanding background research
- Significance sandwich
  - Overall **significance**, problem, question
  - Background research
  - Specific **significance**

# Background Search

- Missing important published studies is one reason for a proposal being marked down
- Finding *all* the relevant research
  - Electronic search terms
  - Published reviews
  - Hand searches of key journals
  - Branching through citations
  - Science Citation Index traces
  - Colleague pre-review

# Background Theory

- What organizing theories are relevant?
- What theory guided your study design, selection of measures and methods?
- What theory or theories would be tested in the proposed study?
- Are there theories that make conflicting predictions?

# Background Components

- Index card sorting
- What are the major clusters of background research findings?
- These become the side-heads of your background section
- It is strongly recommended that you outline all of this before you start writing this section

# B. Background and Significance

- B.1 College Binge Drinking: Epidemiology and Intervention Effectiveness
  - B.1.1. Universal preventive interventions.
  - B.1.2. Targeted interventions.
  - B.1.3. Motivational Interviewing approaches to binge drinking prevention.
  - B.1.4. Summary.

# B. Background and Significance

- B.2. Health Information and Interventions on the Internet
  - B.2.1. Categories of health website design.
  - B.2.2. Summary.

# **B. Background and Significance**

- **B.3 Website Development Principles**
- **B.4 Overall Summary**

*What does it look like on the  
page?*

*(take a look)*

## B. Background and Significance

- This outline took 7 pages of narrative to complete
- It is organized on broad to narrower literature focus implicit in the outline
- It uses forecasting statements in the introduction to each section and subsection
- It uses summary sections at the end of each major subsection and section

# Organizing the Components

- A logically organized flow that is easy to read and follow
- that leads right up to the doorstep of the research that you propose to do
- and shows how your research will fit in, extend, complement, or challenge current knowledge and theory
- Numbered side-heads can be helpful in orienting the reviewer to the flow of your argument

# Overall Significance

- The overview: So what? Who cares?
- Significance and Innovation as NIH review criteria
- Why does research in this area matter?
- NIH: How will this benefit health?
- Is there a practical problem addressed by this research?

# Specific Significance

- How will your research be an advance?
- How is this a logical next step?
- What new knowledge will result?
- Does it fill in a gap in research to date?
- How will this knowledge be applicable?
- Where is this line of research going?  
Where might it lead?
- (If in response) How is your research relevant to the needs stated in the PA, RFA, or RFP?

Your Questions??!!