Grading Criteria for Proposed Research Essays (Grant Proposals)

Your final paper grade will be a weighted average of the different versions that you hand in. If you earn a 95% or better on your first submission, you are done with the paper, and the grade you earn on your first submission will be the grade you receive for your paper. If you receive a 95% or better on your 2nd submission, you are done with the paper, and the grade you earn on your second submission will be the grade assigned to your 3rd submission.

There is the possibility of exceptional papers receiving up to 115% Please review the point assignments carefully – it will make writing your paper quite a bit easier!

Title (3 points)
Is informative and gives a clear indication of the subject of the research. (3)

Introduction (25 points)
Develops the context in the literature on the subject of the research. Do not just provide general information – make sure that the information you provide is relevant and helps the reader understand the research. (5)
Establishes a logical link from what is known in the literature to the hypothesis to be tested. (4)
The order of information is logical and flows smoothly from one idea to another. (3)
Uses at least ten citations from the primary literature relevant to the topic of the research (not methodology or marginally related work). (5)
Written so that somebody who is educated, but not necessarily a specialist in the field, can understand the importance of the research. (3)
Clearly written and easy to follow, and not carelessly thrown together. (5)

Hypotheses (12 points)
Correctly reflect the research. (5)
Stated correctly in the form of hypothesis statements (not as questions). (3)
Written so that somebody who is educated, but not necessarily a specialist in the field, can understand the hypotheses in the context of the information provided in the introduction. (2)
Clear and concise. (2)

Methods (13 points)
Sufficient to understand how the hypotheses are being addressed by the research (4)
Not overly burdened with minute details. (3)
Written so that somebody who is educated, but not necessarily a specialist in the field, can understand the methods and how they address the hypotheses. (2)
Clear and concise. (2)
Uses references when necessary. (2)

Intellectual Merit (15 points)
Clearly shows how the proposed research advances knowledge and understanding within its own field or across different fields. (4)
Clearly shows how the proposed research suggests and explores creative, original, or potentially transformative concepts. (3)
Clearly shows that the researchers are qualified to carry out this research. (2)
Clearly shows that the research is well conceived and organized. (4)
Clearly shows that the researchers have access to needed resources. (2)

Broader Impacts (15 points)
Clearly and convincingly shows the broader impacts of the research (Broader impacts include activities that promote teaching and learning, broaden participation of underrepresented groups, and disseminate the results of the research within and beyond the scientific community, as well as any benefits of the research to society). (10)
The broader impacts are realistic and meaningful. (5)

In-Text Citations (6 points)
All citations are consistently formatted. (2)
Citations are correctly placed. (2)
Citations are used correctly (i.e., they say what you say they say). (2)
Literature Cited (6 points)
All references are consistently formatted. (2)
References are either in alphabetical or numerical order, and if they are in numerical order, the numbers correspond correctly to numbers within the text. (2)
There are a minimum of ten references. (2)

Formatting (5 points)
1” margins (1)
Name and “Proposed Research Essay” in header (1)
Double spaced (1)
12 pt Times New Roman font (Word 2003 and earlier) or 11 pt Calibri (Word 2007) (1)
Pages are numbered using the page number feature in Word (1)

Error Free Bonus and Error Penalty:
If your paper is free of spelling and grammar errors you will receive a bonus of five points.
If you have more than three spelling or grammar errors, you will have five points deducted from the overall score.

Penalty for not turning in PDFs of your references with your paper: If you do not email the PDFs of your references when you turn in your paper, I will deduct one point for each missing PDF up to a maximum of ten points.
Bonus for exceptional papers: I reserve the right to reward extra points for papers that I feel show exceptional organization, style, and effort, up to a maximum of ten points.

Some Helpful Notes:
A. NSF Application Review Process
Applications will be reviewed by panels of disciplinary and interdisciplinary scientists, mathematicians, and engineers and other professional experts in graduate education. Applications will be assigned to panels based on the applicant’s chosen field(s) of study and the discipline(s) represented. Thus, applicants are advised to select the fields of study in the FastLane applicant module that are most closely aligned to the proposed graduate program of study and research plan.

Applications to interdisciplinary fields of study are reviewed by interdisciplinary panelists based on the disciplines indicated by the applicant and review of the application by the GRFP staff.

Each application, therefore, will be reviewed independently on the basis of merit using all available information in the completed application. In considering applications, reviewers will be instructed to address the two Merit Review Criteria as approved by the National Science Board - Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts (Grant and Proposal Guide, NSF 08-01). Applicants, therefore, must address each criterion in their written statements to provide reviewers with the information necessary to respond fully to both.

What is the intellectual merit of the proposed activity?
How important is the proposed activity to advancing knowledge and understanding within its own field or across different fields? How well qualified is the proposer (individual or team) to conduct the project? (If appropriate, the reviewer will comment on the quality of prior work.) To what extent does the proposed activity suggest and explore creative, original, or potentially transformative concepts? How well conceived and organized is the proposed activity? Is there sufficient access to resources?

What are the broader impacts of the proposed activity?
How well does the activity advance discovery and understanding while promoting teaching, training, and learning? How well does the proposed activity broaden the participation of underrepresented groups (e.g., gender, ethnicity, disability, geographic, etc.)? To what extent will it enhance the infrastructure for research and education, such as facilities, instrumentation, networks, and partnerships? Will the results be disseminated broadly to enhance scientific and technological understanding? What may be the benefits of the proposed activity to society?

To evaluate the intellectual merit criterion, panelists will consider: the strength of the academic record, the proposed plan of research, the description of previous research experience, references, Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) General and Subject Tests scores, and the appropriateness of the choice of institution relative to the proposed plan for graduate education and research. To help panelists evaluate the broader impacts criterion, applicants should provide characteristics of their background, including personal, professional, and educational experiences, to indicate their potential to fulfill the broader impacts criterion.