



## Instructions

This rubric provides recommendations for a Specific Aims page of a NIH K grant application. In addition to overall considerations, the rubric is broken up into four parts that correspond to the four sections of a Specific Aims page: the **introduction** paragraph, the **body** paragraph(s), the **specific aims** themselves, and the closing, or **impact** paragraph. We Recommend that you use this rubric after you've completed a Specific Aims Page draft to ensure that you have included all the necessary components.

Additional Specific Aims page recommendations can be found on the [Grant Writing Tips](#) resource on the Harvard Catalyst Writing and Communication Center website. In particular, the Specific Aims page should follow the guidance on the following pages: [Write Your Specific Aims Page](#), [Use Style Tips](#), and [Common Grant Writing Mistakes](#).



**Please Note:** Review the completed rubric and carefully note any unchecked boxes. Review the resources linked throughout this document and use them to improve your Specific Aims page.

### Introduction

In this section:

- The first sentence clearly defines the problem that the proposal addresses.
- The paragraph describes why the proposal is important.
- The paragraph includes facts about what is known about the area of research.
- The paragraph explains the current gaps in knowledge and what still needs to be learned.
- The closing sentence of the paragraph states the critical, unmet need.
- The paragraph uses a [funnel shape conceptually](#).

### Body

This section:

- Describes what the applicant is proposing to do (i.e. the solution to the unmet need).
- Describes why the applicant is the most qualified to do this work.
- States the applicant's [long-term goal](#), or the effect that this work will have on their field of research. The long term goal should show the intention to be an independent investigator in this field.
- References any preliminary data that the applicant will build upon. This preliminary data backs up the hypothesis
- States the [central hypothesis](#). The central hypothesis should be one clear, overarching idea, testable by the aims. It should be explicitly written out (e.g. "Our central hypothesis is...").
- Explains why the applicant is doing this work and what the result/payoff will be. It should reference long-term career development goals.



Specific Aims

This section:

- Contains 2-3 specific aims.
- Does not include sub-aims.

Each specific aim:

- Is 1-3 sentences long.
- Starts with a clear title.
- Describes the approach (often called the “rationale” or “working hypothesis”).
- Shows which part of the central hypothesis will be tested through the aim.
- Typically does not have an individual hypothesis.
- Does not rely on the success of previous aims.
- Uses [decisive language](#).

Impact

This section:

- States how the applicant’s research will advance the field.
- Explains the impact of the work on the NIH institution to which the applicant is applying.
- Is written as though success is inevitable.
- States how this grant will prepare the applicant for an R01.

Overall Considerations

**Overall the Specific Aims Page should:**

- Be only one page.
- Use [concise, plain language](#) that a non-expert can understand.
- Follow a logical flow of information.
- Spell out acronyms the first time that they are used.
- Not include citations (the document should stand alone).
- Use effective formatting (e.g. headings, appropriate use of bolding/italicizing).

Notes: