

Make it easy for your readers #2. If you know from the criteria that panelists will be interested in “significance,” make it easy for them to find “significance” in your narrative.

Make it easy for your readers #3. Don’t leave it to panelists to “figure it out.” Do the interpretive work for them.

Balance the abstract and the particular. Tell readers why your project is important, but also provide examples. This goes double for projects that are predominantly theoretical.

Show panelists that you know what you’re doing. Describe your planned methods and sources.

Tell them why you are using those particular theories or case studies.

Anticipate your readers’ concerns and address them.

After your application is drafted, ask yourself what kind of narrative the panelist will put together about YOU and YOUR PROJECT. Reading your cv and narrative, will panelists understand how you’ve arrived at your project? Do they know where you will be in your proposed project when the grant starts? Have you explained what you will do during the grant period? And is it clear when you anticipate completing your project? This narrative is important to panelists when they meet to discuss your application.

Details, details, details

What separates the Excellent applications from the Very Good applications is often the attention to details.

Ask colleagues (not friends), both inside and outside your field, to read a draft application.

Make sure your bibliography is up to date, and it gives a good “snapshot” of your project.

Proofread your work. Panelists do not expect adherence to a particular style (i.e. MLA, Chicago) but they do expect a well-executed narrative.

Make sure your references know what you expect them to do; make sure they have the evaluation criteria and a copy of your application; check to make sure they submit their letters.

If you don’t succeed, ask for feedback and try again.

If you have already applied and been turned down, remember that panels are constructed anew each year.

Information on NEH grant opportunities, subscribing to our Twitter feed, etc. can be found at www.neh.gov

If you get stumped along the way, contact someone at NEH for help.