Top Ten Mistakes to Avoid in Writing CAREER Proposals

CISE Mixed Advisory Taskforce on Technology, Education, Research and Science (CISE MATTERS)
Number 10: Fonts Too Small

- Small fonts promote reader fatigue
- Reviewers HATE small fonts
- GPG mandates:
  - 11 point font minimum
  - 1 inch margins
  - 6 lines max per vertical inch
Number 9: Figures Illegible

• Avoid “crowded” visuals

• Don’t assume reader will print in color

• Use vector graphic formats
Acronyms are **UGLY**, and make text hard to read.

Acronyms limit your audience to those who already know them...
Number 7: Dissing the Competition

- **Good idea:** Citing others’ work
- **Bad idea:** Slighting others’ work

(“Others” might be sitting on the panel)
Number 6: Poor distinction between preliminary results and proposed work

- Make a clear demarcation
- Distinguish your results from others’
- Provide clear road map for future work
Number 5: Lackluster Education Plan

- Should be integrated with research plan
- Think **beyond** your present teaching duties
Number 4: Dull Broader Impacts

• Broader Impacts ask:
  – How will this work change society?
• Don’t confuse this with “extracurricular activities” not supported by the research plan
• Outreach plans should be actionable
Number 3: Confining yourself to your PhD work

- CAREER proposal should be forward-looking
- Move above and beyond your PhD work
- “Imagine a world ...”

(Yes)  (No)
Number 2: “It wasn’t clear ...”

Symptoms:
- Long-winded explanations
- Too many superfluous details
- Poor organization of thoughts into words

Remedies:
- Use fewer words
- Read first two pages aloud
- “Make every word tell”
Number 1: Research Plan lacking Cohesion

• Don’t staple together unrelated ideas
• Don’t offer a laundry list with no prioritization
• Don’t make everything look like a nail to your one hammer

• Tell a story with your narrative
Questions?