**Colloquial Language and Jargon**

Grant applications can receive anywhere from 1-4 points deductions due to colloquial language and jargon. It is important both for applicants and reviewers to know what deductions are appropriate. Grants should be written for a general **educated** audience. Terminology that is necessary to particular fields should not be penalized if an educated reader can understand the context of its use. However, applicants should make every effort to maintain accessibility.

Examples of terminology for various fields includes:

Biology: Mitosis, Cellular Respiration, amino acids, pollinator etc.

Social Science: Stakeholder, governance,

Business and Finance: deficit, cost-benefit, inflation

Law Enforcement: suspect, perpetrator, all-points bulletin (APB)

These words all serve as fairly basic vocabulary for their respective fields and are not easily replaced. With these in mind here are some examples of sentences using too much jargon – i.e. too technical and not easily understood” and more appropriate use of terminology:

Jargon: Doubly differential cross sections (DDCSs) for single ionization of molecular hydrogen by 75keV proton impact have been measured and calculated as a function of the projectile scattering angle and energy loss.

Accessible: We will be measuring and calculating how much energy is lost from a hydrogen atom through a process called “projectile scattering.”

Jargon: “Dimensional reduction using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was conducted on both SST and precipitation to assess the level of correlation between the leading patterns of SST and precipitation variability”

Accessible: The relationship between the year-to-year variation in sea-surface temperature and global precipitation was determined using a statistical method to reduce large-volumes of information to a single time-series.

The point in both of these examples is that even if you don’t understand the method you can understand what the method is essentially doing. Technical language cannot be avoided in many fields and there is a big difference between using the language of a field and writing something in an inaccessible way.

Colloquial language is the language we use in informal settings. This can include widely understood sayings and slang. Examples include:

“By the way” – could be replaced with “incidentally”

“I’ll keep you posted” – “I will keep you informed”

“by and large” – “Generally” or “Overall”

An example of how you would avoid informal writing is as follows:

Too colloquial “If you think honeybees are not important to ecosystem health, think again!”

Appropriate: “Contrary to popular perception, honeybees are crucial to ecosystem health”

* Avoid addressing the reader directly.

Also avoid emotional language:

Too colloquial: “Going to this conference would mean a lot to me. I have not had the opportunity to present before and it would be an amazing experience”

Appropriate: “As a first-time presenter, attending this conference would be valuable on both a personal and professional level”

* The first sentence is too emotional and informal. A grant reader doesn’t really care about how attending a conference will make you *feel* on a personal level. If it is how you would talk to your friends it is probably too informal.

**Remember that acronyms are appropriate if they are defined with first use.**

For those who are **writing** grant applications, when considering the use of technical language ask yourself: “Does the explanation of my research make sense to someone with a basic understanding of my field?”. If possible, replace highly technical terms if they are not absolutely necessary.

For **readers**: If by the end of the abstract, you don’t understand what the research is because of too much technical language then you may consider deducting in this category. Use your best judgement.