HOW TO WRITE AND DEFEND A SUCCESSFUL ERC PROPOSAL?

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SOME PRELIMINARIES TO KEEP IN MIND

• Task of jury in Stage 1: kill 80% of excellent proposals...
• 12 panelists in Stage 1, covering all fields within panel
• Stage 1: panelists read 5 pp. CV, 5 pp. project: must say it all!
  • Make self-contained, do not expect panelists to screen websites, papers,...
  • Use freedom in format to stand out! Major achievements so far?
• Panelists have few minutes/page to judge (upload scores+cards)
• Stage 2: write convincingly for both panelists & expert referees in your field
  • Make task of panelists & referees as pleasant as possible (correct English!)
• 10% of Panelists is colour-blind, most panelists need glasses...
TIPS FOR APPLICATION TEXT

• Stick to the instructions: **read & evaluate them again after you have finished**
• Respect rules defined by funding agency, even if you find them silly: **you are not obliged** to apply for funding...
• Give balanced state-of-the-art: **is the ground-braking aspect clear?**

- Is the project timely? Does it fit in this stage of your career? Are you an independent researcher? Will you be a world-leader after StG?
TIPS FOR APPLICATION TEXT: DISCUSS FEASIBILITY

- Is the project feasible? Comment! Risky (yes) ≠ unfeasible (no)
- Does it depend on experiments? Which ones? Access? Data rights?
- Do not hide but discuss all important dependencies
- Are you a PI of crucial observations/experiments? Do you have the needed permissions?
- Give a risk assessment and a back-up plan
- Discuss the high gain, without exagerrating
TIPS FOR APPLICATION TEXT: KEEP IT SIMPLE

- Simple illustrative figures or context diagrams are very welcome to explain complex methodology or connections between various work packages.

- Avoid complicated and busy diagrams: referees have limited time/proposal.

- Keep in mind that jury is multidisciplinary within the panel: no jargon!
An interview can be intimidating...

Be yourself! Dress comfortably

Prepare yourself well in advance, so that you feel comfortable with your act. Rehersal in front of colleagues and/or mirror!

The jury might not be what you had anticipated/hoped for... don’t let it perturbe you
TIPS FOR THE INTERVIEW: KEEP IT EVEN SIMPLER

- Avoid movies that might fail or do not work on obliged device to use...
- Use a strong voice! Make an effort for this interview
- Don’t use a pointer when you are too nervous for it
TIPS FOR THE INTERVIEW: BE ENTHOUSIASTIC

- Let the chair(wo)man of the panel take the word:
  - you will get instructions from the panel chair
  - if panel members introduce themselves: nod and smile at them
  - do not take the word until you are offered to do so by the chair
- Introduce yourself and deliver the talk as requested
- NEVER run over time! Clock your presentation within a minute
- Make sure the audience is listening to you and does not get distracted! You are more important than your slides...
- Anticipate too much or too little light in the room, as well as a lousy beamer: use appropriate colours & background in the slides
- If you are not enthusiastic, how do you expect the jury to be?...
TIPS FOR THE INTERVIEW: ANSWER TO-THE-POINT

• For the questions-and-answers part:
  • never interrupt a jury member before his/her questions are asked
  • if jury members start to discuss among themselves, just let them (the clock is ticking in your advantage)
  • have some appropriate questions ready from your side to the jury
• You may be asked questions beyond the science:
  • what is the weakest point of the proposal/project? Improvement?...
  • give your weakest point as scientist: how will you improve that?
  • give your weakest point as a manager of a team of young scientists
• Panelists are locked-up in a room for 4 days: tired! Make the conversation as pleasant as possible
5/12/2013: Francqui Prize 1-day Tutorial on “How to survive from PhD to tenure-track” material + hints&tricks available upon request
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