Setting a timeline, letters of recommendation, and pre-submission review

Writing Fellowship Proposals Workshop – Graduate Student Summit, September 2016

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Setting a timeline
- Start as soon as possible
- Plan backwards setting intermediate deadlines for drafts
- Create a checklist with these deadlines – I create a workbook in Excel
- Ask reviewers and LOR writers in advance if they have time to help you
- Give reviewers 1-2 weeks to provide feedback
- Give recommenders 4-6 weeks to provide letters
- NSF GRFP: Grad students can now only apply once in either their 1st or 2nd year. If you’re a non-traditional student or are still deciding about your research plan, I highly recommend applying the start of your 2nd year.

Letters of recommendation (LOR)
- Ask potential recommenders early in the process, at least 1 month before the deadline
- Ask people who know you well
- Ask people who have worked with you recently who can speak to your current work and skill level
- Ask politely and give thanks – no one is required to do this, it is out of the kindness of their hearts!
- Prepare a packet:
  - Provide deadline, instructions, review criteria, and links for submitting
  - Provide your proposal (draft okay) and CV
  - Suggest what you want them to highlight – Ex. My strong academic background. Or the merit of my research to the field.
- If you get two or more references pick complementing recommendations – Can one person speak more directly about your technical skills and another about your outreach skills?
- Offer to meet with them to chat about your goals and experiences
- Send a reminder email 1-2 weeks before deadline

Questions:
Who do I ask to write LOR? How do I ask?

Pre-submission review
- Make sure you follow the guidelines exactly – font, margins, format etc.
- Have multiple people review your application, including people outside of your area of expertise
- People familiar with your work may “read between the lines” in places that are unclear or incomplete
- Consider asking someone without a science background review your work
- Provide the grant instructions and decision criteria to reviewers
- Think of editing as a process of distillation, filtering out murky muck until you extract the essential elements of your research
- Final proof: Print it out and read it backwards one sentence at a time

Questions:
Who to I get to review my work and how do I ask?
Resources

Getting Good Recommendation Letters  

How to Write a Great Statement of Purpose  
http://www.uni.edu/~gotera/gradapp/stmtpurpose.htm

A Leg Up on Applying for the NSF GRFP  
https://www.eccforum.org/leg-applying-nsf-grfp

Writing a winning NSF Graduate Research Fellowship research proposal  

CVs  