# SBIR Proposal Writing Basics: Wake Me Up When It’s Time To Vote

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Imagine a reviewer of SBIR proposals for a Federal agency. Imagine he/she is serving as a reviewer as a “volunteer,” meaning they are not getting any compensation and have to do the work on their own time and after hours. Imagine they are reviewing a pile of Phase I proposals late on a Sunday night because they are supposed to intelligently talk about them at the meeting of their fellow reviewers early Monday morning. The reviewer is tired, is ready to nod off at any moment, and picks up your proposal and reads an abstract that begins:

“Coronary artery disease (CAD) is a national and worldwide epidemic that places the largest clinical and economic burden on the healthcare system of any disease condition.”

Remembering the reviewer’s semi-conscious state, what is their reaction? Chances are their eyes roll back into their head, and they softly slide off the recliner and into a fetal position on the floor where they enjoy la-la-land for the next 8 hours.

Do you now understand why we encourage Phase I SBIR/STTR proposal submitters to come up with a compelling and attention grabbing introduction to their abstract/project summary? You must assume your reviewer is in rough shape, and needs everything you can muster to wake up, pay attention to and understand your proposal, get excited about it, and commit to recommending it for funding.

So how would you start your abstract instead of the ho-hum example given above? How about this one:

“Up to 85% of all coronary stents are under-deployed leading to higher target revascularization rates (TVR), in-stent restenosis, in-stent thrombosis, and therefore, higher mortality.”

Wow, that’s an eye opener, isn’t it? Maybe your reviewer, or someone near and dear to them, has a coronary stent, and is now shocked to learn that 85% of them don’t fully open and this can lead to death. That might just be enough to jar the semi-conscious reviewer out of his/her slumber, and get them focused on how you propose to solve this unacceptable situation of only 15 out of 100 stents properly deploying and people dying because of it.

So, next time you are tempted to write a boring introduction to your Phase I proposal’s abstract, remember the fatigued volunteer reviewer who may not stay awake if you don’t give him/her a reason to do so as they review your proposal. Find something compelling to say, or present a boring statistic into a new and different way that the reviewer hasn’t seen or thought about before (example: don’t say that a particular disease kills 25,000 Americans a year, but say that, in the time it takes the reviewer to read your proposal, 10 Americans will die of this disease). Be innovative in how you sell the reviewers on the importance of your innovation!