From http://grants.nih.gov/grants/how-to-apply-application-guide/format-and-write/write-your-application.htm#Important%20Writing%20Tips

Important Writing Tips

You've planned, you've researched, you understand the application…now it's time to write. A well-written, well formatted application is an important key to success. Remember the details when formatting attachments!

TIP #1: Make Your Project's Goals Realistic

Don't propose more work than can be reasonably done during the proposed project period.

- Before you start writing the application, think about the budget and how it is related to your research plan. Remember that everything in the budget must be justified by the work you've proposed to do.

- Be realistic. Don't propose more work than can be reasonably done during the proposed project period. Make sure that the personnel have appropriate scientific expertise and training. Make sure that the budget is reasonable and well-justified.

TIP #2: Be Organized and Logical

Why? Reviewers are accustomed to finding information in specific sections of the application. This creates an efficient evaluation process and saves reviewers from hunting for required information.

Start with an outline, following the suggested organization of the application. The thought process of the application should be easy to follow.

Note: Upon submission, NIH Systems will automatically add: headers, footers (time stamping, tracking number, FOA number, and page numbers). Therefore, do not include headers or footers.

- Write clear headings.

- Use sub-headings, short paragraphs, and other techniques to make the application as easy to navigate as possible. Be specific and informative, and avoid redundancies.

- Bookmark major sections.

- Use diagrams, figures and tables, and include appropriate legends, to assist the reviewers to understand complex information. These should complement the text and be appropriately inserted. Make sure the figures and labels are readable in the size they will appear in the application.

- Use bullets and numbered lists for effective organization. Indents and bold print add readability. Bolding highlights key concepts and allows reviewers to scan the pages and retrieve information quickly.

- Utilize white space effectively.

TIP #3: Write in Clear Concise Language

Why? A reviewer must often read 10-15 applications in great detail so your application has a better chance of being successful if it is easy-to-read and well-written.

- Write a clear topic sentence for each paragraph with one main point or idea. This is key for readability.

- Make your points as direct as possible. Avoid jargon or excessive language.

- Write simple and clear sentences, keeping to about 20 words or less in each.

- Be consistent with terms, references and writing style.

- Use the active, rather than passive, voice. For example, write "We will develop an experiment, "not "An experiment will be developed."

- Spell out all acronyms on first reference.

- If writing is not your forte, seek help!

TIP #4: Sell Your Idea on Paper

Capture the reviewers' attention by making the case for why NIH should fund your research!

- Include enough background information to enable an intelligent reader to understand your proposed work.

- Support your idea with collaborators who have expertise that benefits the project.

TIP #5: Edit Yourself, but also Enlist Help

You've most likely been looking at the same words, sentences and paragraphs repeatedly! Allow someone with fresh eyes read your content, check your punctuation, and give you feedback on whether the content flows.

- Have zero tolerance for typographical errors, misspellings, grammatical mistakes or sloppy formatting. A sloppy or disorganized application may lead the reviewers to conclude that your research may be conducted in the same manner.

- **Remember the Details!**   There are format requirements, such as font size, margins, and spacing. Make sure you are familiar with them before submitting your application and label sections as directed. You don't want your application delayed because any of these details are not incorporated.

- If more than one investigator is contributing to the writing, it would be helpful to have one editor not only review for punctuation errors, but ensure that the application has a consistent writing style.

TIP # 6: Share for Comments

You've most likely been looking at the same words over and over! Allow someone with fresh eyes read your content, check your punctuation, and give you feedback on whether the content flows.

- Request your colleagues or mentors review a first draft of your specific aims early in the process. This step can save lots of valuable time.

- Allow time for an internal review by collaborators, colleagues, mentors and make revisions/edits from that review. If possible, have both experts in your field and those who are less familiar with your science provide feedback.

- Ask those who are providing a review to use a critical eye and evaluate the application using the peer review criteria

- Allow sufficient time to put the completed application aside, and then read it from a fresh vantage point yourself. Also, try proofreading by reading the application aloud.

- Conduct your own review based on the NIH's five peer review criteria. How would you rate your own application?

- Prior to submission, look over the entire grant application one final time. Remember, you want a convincing proposal that is also formatted according to the application guidelines, punctuation error-free, clear to read, and is to the point!