

NIH Biosketch: Contributions and Capabilities

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Last year Galter Library offered a class called “[How to Prepare a New NIH Biosketch](#)”. The response was overwhelming; we had found a topic that perplexed and challenged the FSM community. Now the [new NIH Biosketch](#) is almost a year old, and no longer new to most researchers. But that hasn’t ended our curiosity in how researchers craft their contributions to science in the NIH biosketch.

Many researchers feel burdened when asked to write about their contribution to science. They worry they have too few or too many contributions, or they don’t know how to break out what matters. After reviewing biosketches this year, we’ve compiled some thoughts for each of these mindsets. And don’t forget to share your biosketches with colleagues, who can provide feedback regarding content and interpretation.

The modesty mindset

Some researchers fret over their publication list and miss out on the full range of their contributions: giving presentations, developing open source software, creating educational materials. These contributions show a rich competency in communicating science by making information more open and accessible to the entire research community.

If your publication list is short, or doesn’t adequately support your written contribution, consider highlighting other non-publication research products: audio or video products; patents; data and research materials; databases; educational aids or curricula; instruments or equipment; models; protocols; and software or netware.

The research as a whole mindset

If you have trouble writing more than one contribution, consider how you talk about your work. Think about how you break up ideas to keep the listener from becoming overwhelmed. For each of those ideas, consider answering the questions framed by the biosketch instructions for contributions:

- What is the historical background that frames the scientific problem?
 - What were your central finding(s)?
 - How have the finding(s) influenced the progress of science or been applied to health or technology?
 - What was your specific role in the described work?
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The too much to communicate mindset

If you’ve identified too many contributions, you may be tempted to delete those extra paragraphs. Don’t do it! Every grant you apply for is different, each requiring a biosketch that perfectly frames your contributions and capabilities. Save that

extra text in a separate document or folder dedicated to biosketches, and keep a running list for future use.

Putting your work to use

If you've gone to the trouble of writing out your contributions, consider how you can re-use that work in other ways. Add the contributions to your CV or in an online profile; use contributions as a biography for a speaking engagement, or as the start of a blog post or podcast about your peer-reviewed research.

If you need further assistance, check out the NIH's [Biosketch FAQ](#), and Galter Library's [NIH Biosketch Guide](#).

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