1. Specific Aims (1/2 page):

- set the scene with very few introductory sentences
- list anywhere from 1 to 5 aims of your planned work

2. Background and Significance (1 page):

- review the state of the art of your field; give enough information to appreciate the context of the proposed work, not more
- indicate the outstanding questions/gaps in knowledge
- point out how you expect to fill them

3. Preliminary Data (1page):

- list the data you have acquired as well as materials and tools you have generated that pertain to your proposal; include figures if these illustrate your work
- important (unpublished) contributions of your collaborators, PI or colleagues are also worth mentioning if they have relevance for your project
- list everything by specific aim, if possible

4. Research Plan (1-2 pages):

- structure according to specific aims
- divide into “rationale”, “experimental design” and “methods” sections if possible
- give plenty of detail on aspects that are not standard; omit detailed information on aspects that are (like how to do a Western Blot or PCR)
- include figures such as flow charts or schematics of work flow if these illustrate your plans
- have a “pitfalls and alternative approaches” section; list back-up strategies
- add a short concluding paragraph explaining what you expect to learn

5. Timeline:

- experimental plan for your 1st, 2nd and 3rd year

6. References