

# Some advice on the ERC application

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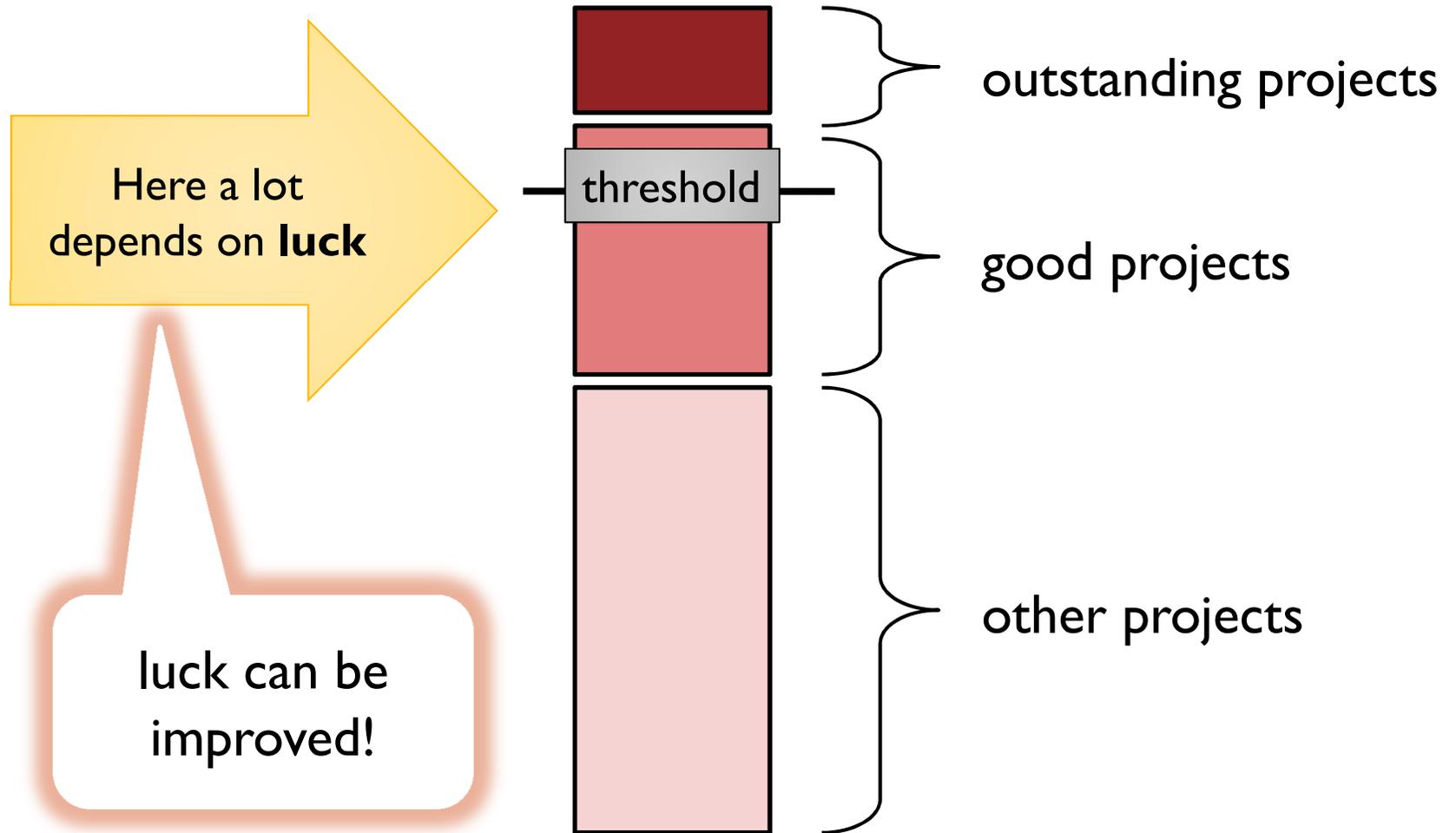


# Disclaimer

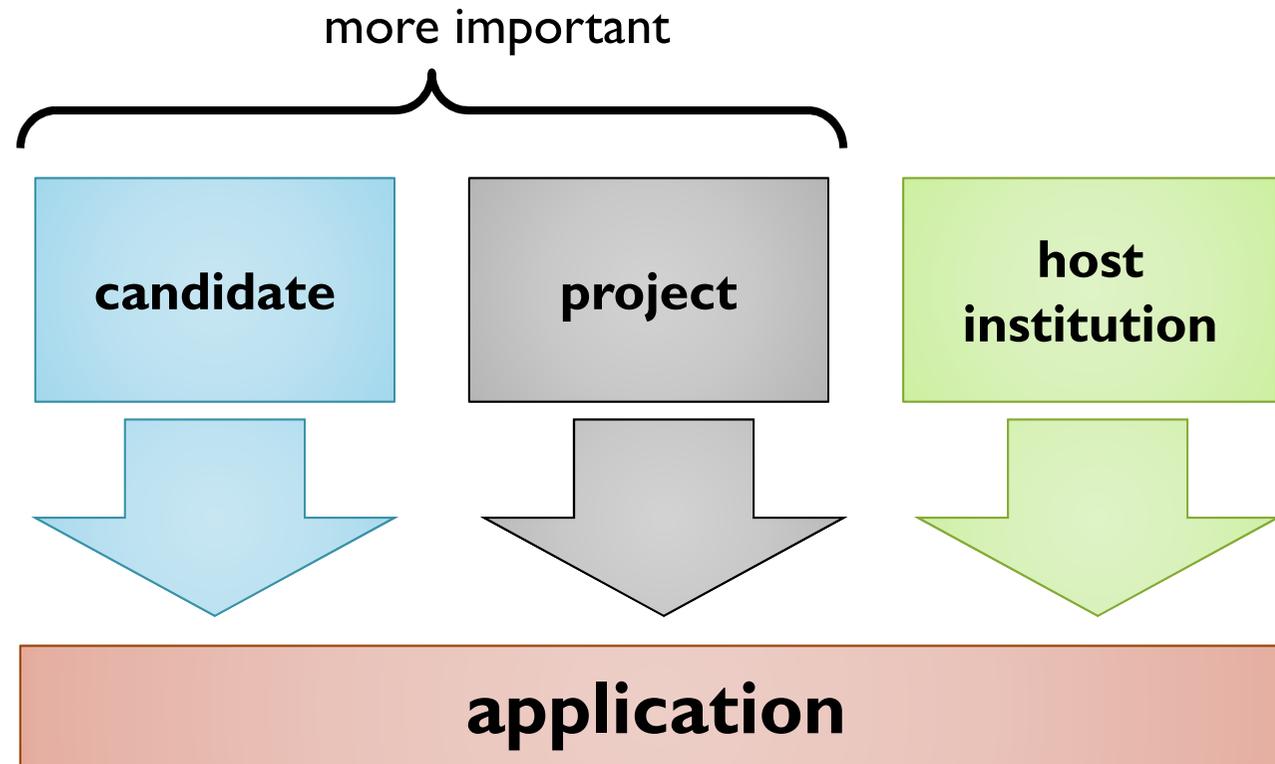
1. My advice is based only on **my own experience**.
2. My field is **computer science**.

Some of my advice may not be applicable in other areas.

# Typical situation in grant competitions (simplified)



# Typical scheme



Questions:

1. What to choose the topic?
2. How to present it?

# Questions



- How to choose the topic?
- How to present:
  - your CV?
  - your project?
  - the host institution?

# Main question

Does your project match the call?

# Example

ERC grants aim to support "Frontier Research", in other words the pursuit of **questions at or beyond the frontiers of knowledge**. [...] In particular, [...] pioneering proposals addressing **new and emerging fields of research** or proposals introducing **unconventional, innovative approaches** and scientific inventions are encouraged.

# Hence:

an application of a type:

“In our last paper we have proven that *blah blah* holds for  $n = \log^{2.34} m$ . We now plan to examine the case when  $n = \log^\lambda m$ , for  $\lambda > 2.34$ .”

may be rejected regardless of the other merits.

# What to put into your application?

Invent your own problems!

The reviewer should not get the impression that it is:



*yet another application  
on **X**...*

# Also:

Avoid long-standing open problems

The reviewer will write:

“the project is too ambitious”

»

“so many people already failed to solve it,  
hence so will you”

# Questions

- How to choose the topic?
-  • How to present:
  - your CV?
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# Wrong approach

Do not lower yourself  
to use “marketing  
tricks”...



(it can work if you are a Nobel price winner)

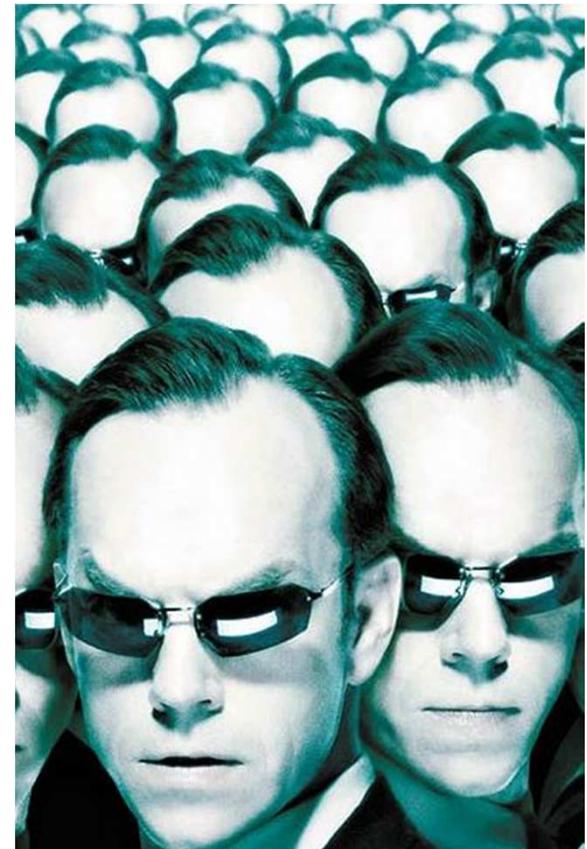
# Right approach

## **Challenge:**

Distinguish yourself from a crowd of similar candidates

## **Moreover:**

Don't lose points for stupid reasons



# Basic strategy

Look on your application “through the eyes of the reviewer”

**Question:**

What are his criteria?

# The reviewer is also a human being!

One should assume that he is competent and responsible.

However it can happen that he:

- doesn't have time,
- is irritable,
- doesn't know the topic in every detail.

# Main principle

Help the reviewer!

- Do not assume that he will **guess what you had in mind!**
- Do not **ignore any mandatory** part of your application.  
(otherwise he will have to give you **zero** points for this)

A non-expert should also understand some part of the application.

(at least the beginning of it)

**Psychological effect:** once he stops understanding he will at least get a positive impression about your application.

advice

frequently put comments like: “*more information on this topic can be found in [...]*”

On the other hand:

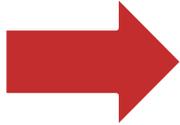
**An expert** should get an impression that you are on top of the field.

You need to show that you know the most recent results.

Your application cannot be too general.

# Questions

- How to choose the topic?
- How to present:
  - your CV?
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# Do not be too modest!

Write sincerely what you are the most proud of.

## Example:

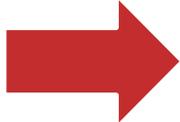
If someone very famous cited you then write

„These results were later used by **X** in [...] (see page **n**)”

Do not hope that the reviewer will find it out himself!

# Questions

- How to choose the topic?
- How to present:
  - your CV?
  - your project?
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# Project

- State-of-the-art and objectives
- Methodology,
- Resources

state-of-the-art

The field **X** is very important because...

Recently we witnessed an enormous progress  
in it **[describe]**

objectives

The goal of this project is to solve the following  
important problems **[a list]**

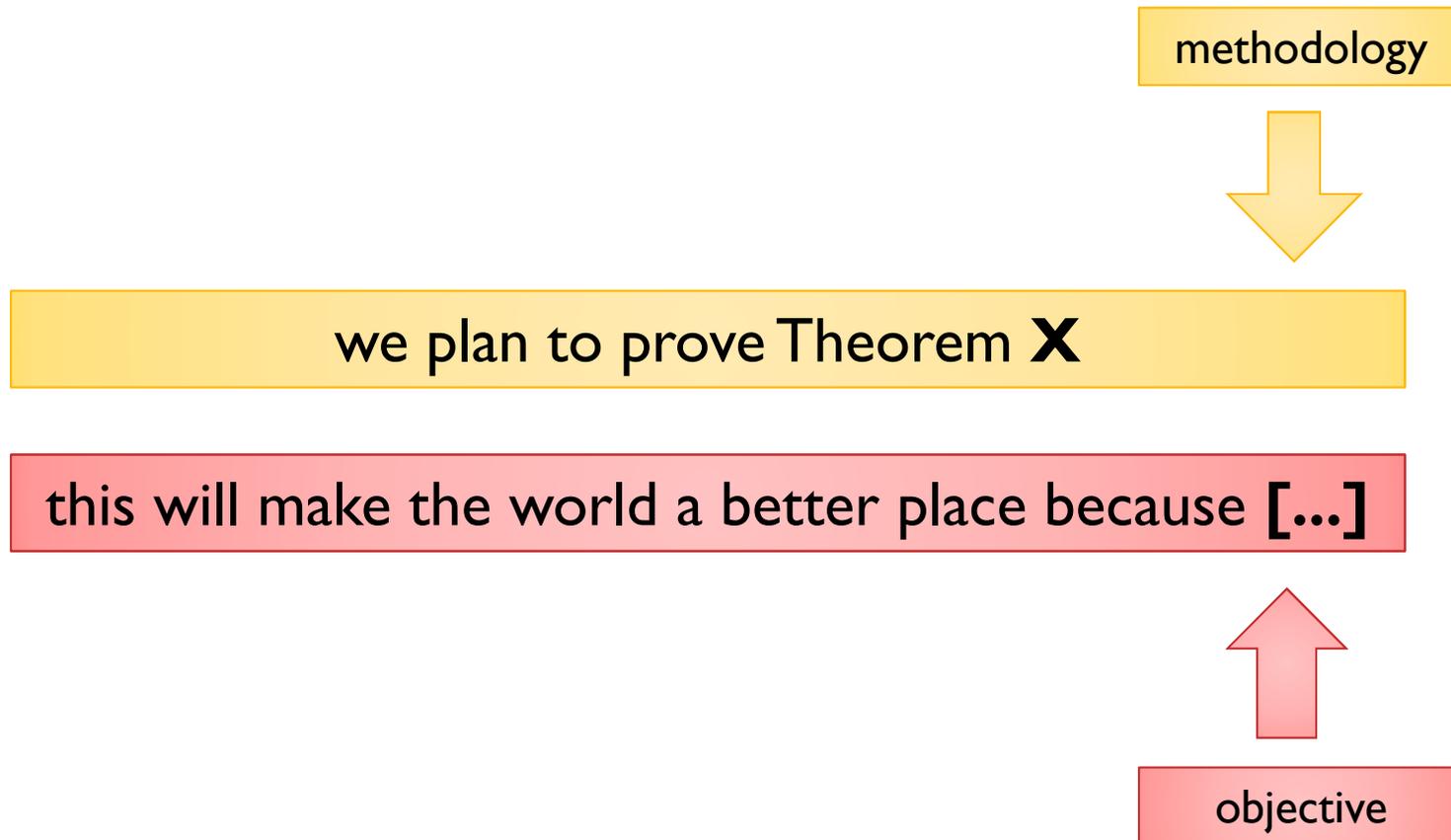
methodology

to achieve it we will perform the following work  
**[a list of research tasks]**

sometimes the  
difference is  
unclear



# Methodology vs. objectives



# State-of-the-art

- omitting someone's contribution is risky
- **on the other hand:** we don't have much space.

## Solution:

- mention all the important results at least briefly.
- stress that the description is not as deep as we would like „*because of the lack of space*”

**Other advice**

# Timing

- Do not write your application in the last moment.
- Show it to your colleagues.

# English

Use correct English.

**On the other hand:** remember that reviewers are likely **not** to be native speakers.

Use **simple language**.

# Style

Being a little bit enthusiastic does not hurt:

*„We believe that new exciting results are just behind the corner”*

# Make the work of reviewer easier

Use many references like:

*„As described in Section **n**, this is interesting only for  $\epsilon > 0.5$ .”*

Don't assume that the reviewer will read all your application at once.

# Document format [1/2]

Use all space available.

This will allow you to say „*because of the lack of space...*”

Moreover: the reviewer will get an impression that you have much more to say.

# Document format [2/2]

Make it look like a **scientific paper**.

In mathematics, physics and computer science:  
write it in **LaTeX**.

# Abstract

Do not write it in the last moment.

This part of your application will be read by the largest number of people

Use it also for marketing!

**Thank you!**