Three rules I follow for writing training fellowship applications

These are general rules I follow when writing any grant or fellowship application. The goals are clarity, "checking off boxes", and pre-emptively addressing reviewer concerns.

1. When writing the research proposal, I always include the following bolded headings. I don't care how redundant it looks. No reviewer can ever complain that I didn't clearly state my hypothesis or alternative strategies!
   a. **Background**
   b. **Goal and significance**
   c. **Hypothesis** (or can bold/underline a hypothesis for each aim)
   d. **Aims 1/2/3**
      i. Restate 1 sentence goal of this aim.
      ii. **Methods**
      iii. **Expected results**
      iv. **Feasibility and alternative strategies**
   e. **Conclusions**
2. Many fellowship applications will list a few things they are looking for in their instructions. For example, instructions might state, "Candidates should address how their research is novel and separate from their advisor's research, and how they are uniquely positioned to carry out this project." Sounds pretty general/obvious, but I would create a bolded heading that addresses this head on: "**Unique ability to carry out project and separation from past advisor's work.**" That way, if reviewers have some "checklist" they're filling out, they don't have to question whether you addressed this or not. They read 100's of applications (quickly) – this makes their job easier.
3. In the personal statement, feel free to highlight challenges you've overcome and address them directly. If you think a reviewer might (stupidly) comment on that C you got in Organic Chemistry (me!), include a *brief* sentence that explains the grade or how you pivoted/overcame that. I think it's an offensive and ludicrous gatekeeping tactic for reviewers to list something like poor undergraduate grades, being first-gen, or your non-PWI training institution as a fault, but sadly I've seen all of these things happen. It's best to confidently highlight your strengths and politely dismiss what you think they might try to drag you on.