

AFR PEER REVIEW GUIDELINES

- Version December 2012 -

These guidelines for remote reviewers and panel members explain the “AFR PhD and Postdoc” selection process.

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Further call information, forms and guidelines are available on the FNR webpage:
www.fnr.lu/AFR.

1. The AFR PhD and Postdoc Grant Scheme

The objective of the AFR grant scheme is to contribute to the development of human resources in research by funding PhD and postdoctoral projects in Luxembourg and abroad.

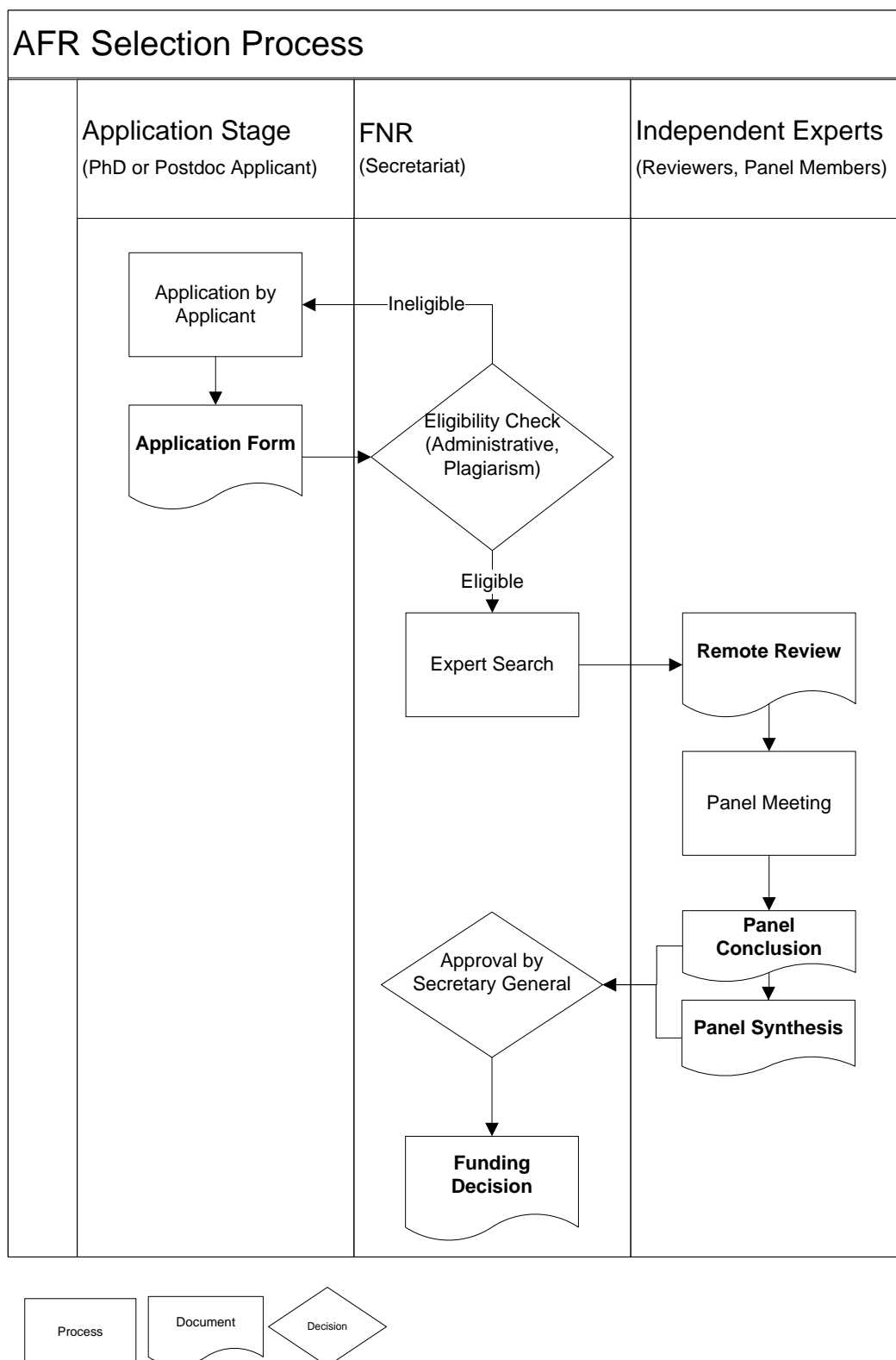
The AFR scheme sets quality standards for doctoral and postdoctoral research training and actively promotes the mobility of researchers. It supports improved working conditions and career perspectives for researchers by funding work contracts with full social security, to be concluded between the AFR beneficiaries and their host institutions.

The AFR scheme further promotes public-private partnerships (AFR-PPP) by paying an incentive for research projects carried out in collaboration with the private sector.

The scheme is in line with the principles of the *European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for their Recruitment*. The postdoc scheme receives financial support by the European Commission (FP7-People-COFUND). Beneficiaries of the AFR postdoc scheme calls 2009 to 2013 who are eligible for Marie-Curie COFUNDing¹, are thus fellows of the highly-esteemed Marie-Curie Scheme.

¹ Eligible are all AFR fellows besides Luxembourg nationals carrying out their AFR postdoc grant in Luxembourg. Luxembourg nationals are only eligible if they have carried out research in a third country (not EU or associated countries) for at least 3 years.

2. Selection process and criteria



2.1. AFR Selection Process

Submitted proposals undergo an eligibility and plagiarism check at the FNR.

Only eligible proposals will move to the review stage.

The review is carried out by the AFR panel, assisted by external experts for the evaluation of the postdoc proposals. The panel is organised in several thematic groups, each of which has a panel chair (see Section 4).

Following consultation with the thematic panel, proposals of a given call are allocated for remote review. In addition, one panel presenter per proposal is designated. While PhD proposals are evaluated solely by panel members, remote experts are contacted in addition for postdoc proposals to complement the domains of expertise not sufficiently covered by the panel.

Remote reviews are submitted to the FNR before the panel meeting, using the **AFR Remote Review Form**. Panel members receive access to all proposals and remote reviews before the meeting.

At the panel meeting, the panel presenter introduces the project and the remote reviews and presents a draft conclusion. Based on the remote reviews and the outcome of the discussion, each thematic panel rates applications and draws a list of proposals recommended for funding.

In a final step, the panel reconsiders all proposals and recommendations.

The panel ensures that the overall available number of proposals to be allocated is respected by a fair selection outcome. A reserve list of excellent proposals may be proposed per thematic panel.

At the end or after the panel meeting, the presenter writes the evaluation synthesis using the dedicated form for the '**AFR Evaluation Synthesis**' (see Annex 2), summarising the arguments that justify the funding recommendation by the panel for the given proposal.

Finally, the FNR secretary general formally validates the funding decision which is communicated to the applicants and their hosts.

Together with the funding decision, the applicant receives a copy of the 'AFR Evaluation Synthesis', plus - in the case of postdoc applications - the full remote reviews.

2.2. AFR Selection Criteria

AFR Selection Criteria for PhD and Postdoc Proposals

- *Scientific quality of the research project*
- *Profile/potential of the applicant*
- *Quality of the host institution*
- *Interest of the research project in the Luxembourg R&D setting*

For postdocs, in addition:

- *Potential of the research project for career development*

The interpretation of each criterion varies slightly between PhD and postdoc application. As a general rule, it can be stated that for PhD applications, a stronger attention is put on the quality of the supervision and the research environment. However, selection criteria are not formally weighted.

Detailed content per selection criterion is provided in the **AFR Remote Review Form** in [Annex 1](#). Evaluators are requested to comment on all criteria in the Form, answering to the questions indicated and referring to the source information in the indicated sections of the application documents.

3. Remote Evaluation

3.1. Role of Reviewers

Based on international good practice of peer-review, proposals are remotely evaluated by independent external experts (either panel members or additional reviewers).

The remote reviewers are requested to:

- Carefully read the AFR Evaluation Guidelines and call documents (www.fnr.lu/afr);
- Sign in a 'FNR Review Participation Form'/Confidentiality Agreement; see [Annex 3](#);
- Thoroughly read the assigned Proposal(s);
- Complete and submit the AFR Peer Review Form(s).

Reviewers rate each selection criterion and summarise the essential points that led to the rating in the AFR Remote Review Form (see [Annex 1](#)).

The remote reviewers for PhD proposals are generalists and not experts in the specific domain. The criterion 'scientific quality' will be evaluated from a generalist point of view without focusing on a detailed scientific analysis. It should reflect whether the overall proposal has the necessary components for a successful PhD.

Top scores should only be awarded if criteria are rated of exceptionally high quality.

Remote reviewers are asked to finalise their review by the overall funding recommendation summarised hereafter.

3.2. Overall Funding Recommendation (by remote reviewer)

Funding recommendation	Explanation
A+ Excellent proposal	Project of excellent quality that should be funded
A Very good proposal	Project of very good quality that may be funded
B Good proposal	Project of good quality that could be funded
C Fair or weak proposal	Project of too low quality to warrant funding.

Together with the overall funding recommendation, remote reviewers summarise the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal.

Guidelines for writing remote reviews

- Strengths/weaknesses should be presented in a structured way;
- The formulation of the comments should reflect objectivity;
- Balanced feedback with constructive criticism should be given, supported by examples;
- Alternative approaches should be suggested where appropriate to improve the proposal;
- **The overall score should match with the written comments – otherwise the applicants might not have confidence in the assessment;**
- Comments should be written for generalists in the field – attention should be paid not to bias judgement in favour of the reviewer's field of expertise.

4. AFR Panel

4.1. Panel Meeting

The AFR panel is nominated annually by the FNR Board. Before taking up their mandate, panel members sign a participation and confidentiality agreement (see section 6).

The panel is organised in several thematic groups, each of which has a panel chair. The thematic panel meeting is opened by the chair who gives an overall indication of the available maximum number of PhD and postdoc proposals that can be allocated.

The panel meeting then starts with the actual discussion of the proposals. The panel presenter introduces the project and its remote evaluations to the panel members and suggests a funding recommendation discussed with the panel. The role of panel members is of particular importance in the cases where the opinions of the presenter and/or remote reviewers are divergent. Together, the panel formulates the funding recommendation which the presenter summarises following the panel meeting, by completing the Evaluation Synthesis Form online (see section 5).

At the end of each panel session, the chair invites the members to discuss general issues and recommendations to the FNR.

After the panel meeting, a report of the panel session is written and approved by the panel chair, including a list of PhD and Postdoc proposals recommended for funding, a ranked reserve list (if applicable), as well as a list of proposals not retained for funding.

4.2. Role of Panel Chair

The FNR appoints one panel chair for each thematic group. She/he plays a pivotal role in the AFR evaluation process by:

- Chairing the panel meeting
- Supervising the evaluation process of proposals in the given thematic group
- Approving the panel report prepared by the FNR programme manager(s)
- Ensuring that the maximum number of proposals to be allocated for a given call is respected and that the selection outcome is fair.

5. Evaluation Synthesis and Funding Recommendation

The evaluation synthesis and funding recommendation by the panel is written by the presenter following the panel session by using the form provided for the ‘**AFR Evaluation Synthesis**’ in the online system (see [Annex 2](#)) and contains the following parts:

- Overall funding recommendation of the proposal with the clear indication **“recommended for funding / “not recommended for funding”**
- Overall assessment (main arguments supporting the recommendation; max. ¼ page)
- Suggested modifications or mandatory clarifications (only for proposals recommended for funding)
- Ethical considerations

5.1. Overall Funding Recommendation (by Panel)

Funding recommendation:
Excellent proposal, recommended for funding
Proposal recommended for funding
Proposal not recommended for funding

If a proposal is not recommended for funding, the panel may recommend its resubmission, but should use this option very restrictively.

The anonymised *Evaluation Synthesis* represents the final funding recommendation of the panel.

5.2. Guidelines for writing the final Evaluation Synthesis

- Arguments in the synthesis should summarise the most important comments of the remote reviews and the panel meeting and should clearly justify the funding recommendation;
- The synthesis should be kept coherent throughout;
- The validity of factual information that has a major influence on the funding decision should be checked;
- Criticism should be constructive and supported with examples;
- Recommendations to improve the quality of the project should be made;
- Under a separate column the suggested modifications or mandatory clarifications should be indicated: these should only be listed for proposals recommended for funding; if proposals are not retained, the suggested/mandatory modifications should figure under the overall comments;
- **The main argument(s) that lead to a positive or negative funding decision should be highlighted;**
- *For postdoc proposals:* Conflicting arguments in the remote reviews should be resolved by proposing a justified conclusion.

6. Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest

Before accessing the Proposal, reviewers and panel members have to sign the '**Review Participation Form**' which includes a confidentiality agreement (see [Annex 3](#)).

6.1. Confidentiality

Project proposals, reviews and other documents are confidential. Application documents and names of reviewers or panel members should therefore be handled with care and treated as **confidential** before, during and after the evaluation process. Reviewers and panel members must not disclose any information concerning application documents or evaluations to outsiders, nor should they use confidential information to their own or any other party's benefit or disadvantage.

If reviewers are contacted by anyone who has questions about application documents or evaluation statements, they should be directed to the responsible FNR programme manager.

The funding decision that is sent to the applicants does not mention any name of reviewers or panel members.

6.2. Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest exists when a person (reviewer or panel member) has a relationship with other persons or organizations that may inappropriately influence or bias his or her assessment. There is a potential for a conflict of interest whether or not an individual believes that a relationship affects his or her scientific judgment. Conflicts can occur as the result of financial relationships, professional, personal and family relationships, or academic competitive pressures. All participants in the peer review and publication process must disclose all relationships that could be viewed as a potential conflict of interest at any time during the peer review process.

6.3. Inability to perform obligations

If for some reason the reviewers and panel members are not able to fulfil their obligations for a given work, the responsible FNR programme manager should be informed immediately. The work cannot be delegated to another person without the prior written agreement of the FNR.

7. Role of the Programme Managers

The programme manager of a specific thematic group organises the panel meeting and coordinates the selection of proposals.

She/he serves as interlocutor for organisational issues related to the AFR programme and the AFR calls and actively supports the involved panel members and experts during the evaluation process.

The programme manager takes care that the FNR rules and procedures are respected.

She/he also reviews the administrative and budgetary part of the proposals and clarifies questions related to legal, budgetary or administrative issues.

FNR collaborators do not provide any information regarding the status of the applications to the applicants while the evaluation procedure is in progress and until the funding decision has been taken.

8. AFR contacts

Thematic domain Groups

Group 1: Bio/biomedical research, life and environmental sciences

Marie-Claude Marx, PhD	Programme manager (on maternity leave)
	Email: marie-claude.marx@fnr.lu ; phone : +352 261925-21
Dr. Olga Martins de Brito	Programme manager
	Email: olga.debrito@fnr.lu ; phone : +352 261925-21
Susana Pinto	Programme assistant
	Email: susana.pinto@fnr.lu ; phone : +352 261925-42

Group 2: IT, mathematics, physics and engineering

Dr. Helena Burg	Programme manager
	Email: helena.burg@fnr.lu ; phone : +352 261925-55
Tom Jakobs	Programme assistant
	Email: tom.jakobs@fnr.lu ; phone: +352 261925-45

Group 3: Economics, law and social sciences

Asaël Rouby	Programme manager
	Email: asael.rouby@fnr.lu ; phone: +352 261925-49
Angelina Clemens	Programme assistant
	Email: angelina.clemens@fnr.lu ; phone: +352 261925-39

Group 4: Humanities and educational sciences

Ulrike Kohl	Head of Unit
	Email: ulrike.kohl@fnr.lu ; phone: +352 261925-32
Angelina Clemens	Programme assistant
	Email: angelina.clemens@fnr.lu ; phone: +352 261925-39

AFR Email: afr@fnr.lu; Homepage: www.fnr.lu/afr

Annex 1: AFR Remote Review Form

AFR Reference:

Name of Applicant:

1st Criterion: Proposal's Scientific Quality

- *Is the research project appropriate for a PhD?/for a postdoc level project?*
- *Is the project idea original and is the hypothesis clear? Are the research objectives clearly formulated?*
- *Is the proposed methodology appropriate?*
- *Is the work plan feasible? Is the workload appropriate?*
- *What are the expected outcomes?*
- *Other comments?*

(source: project description ; application form section 7.1)

Reviewer Rating : **Excellent, very good, good, fair, weak²**

Reviewer Comments :

(use more space if necessary)

2nd Criterion: Applicant's potential

- *Earlier achievements of the applicant (grades in diploma; awards or prizes; any relevant experience prior to the application)*
- *Does the applicant have the adequate profile/background for the proposed project?*
- *What is your impression of the suitability of the applicant in view of the personal statement and reference letter(s)?*
- *Other comments?*

(source: CV applicant (7.4), letter of intent (7.3), reference letter(s), diploma, relevée de notes (7.5))

Reviewer Rating : **Excellent, very good, good, fair, weak²**

Reviewer Comments :

(use more space if necessary)

3rd Criterion: Quality of Host Institution (incl. supervision and training)

- *How do you rate the scientific excellence of the main supervisor/scientific contact? and of the research group? In particular: Does the supervisor/scientific contact (or the hosting group) have a proven track record in the domain of the proposal?*
- *Is scientific/non-scientific training offered according to the needs of the applicant?*
- *Other comments?*
- For PhDs in addition:
- *How is the supervision organised? Is it appropriate? Are you confident about the supervision by the supervisor/supervisory team at the main host institution?*
- *How do you assess the performance of the last 3 (finished) PhD/postdocs trained earlier by the supervisor?*

(source: CV(s) supervisor(s) (7.7), description of HI (and collaborating institution(s) (7.6), training plan, application form section 2 and 3)

Reviewer Rating : **Excellent, very good, good, fair, weak²**

Reviewer Comments :

(use more space if necessary)

² Delete the non appropriate

For Postdocs only: 4th Criterion: Potential of the Project for Career Development

- *How does the research project advance the career of the applicant?*
- *Is this the right project at the right moment and the right place for the career advancement of the applicant?*
(source: letter of intent; project description; description of research group and collaborating institutions; CV of scientific advisor(s))

Reviewer Rating : **Excellent, very good, good, fair, weak²**

Reviewer Comments:
(use more space if necessary)

Does the proposal raise ethical or data protection issues?

Have they been adequately addressed? (source: project description ; application form section 4)

Reviewer Comments:

Overall funding recommendation

Excellent, very good, good, fair, weak²

Give a short explanation of your overall funding recommendation (max. 1/4 page)

Reviewer Comments:

Suggested Modifications? If yes, specify:

Reviewer Comments :

Mandatory Modifications? If yes, specify:

Reviewer Comments :

Annex 2: Evaluation Synthesis Form

AFR Code:

AFR Applicant Name:

Project Title:

Overall Funding Recommendation by the Panel:

Excellent proposal, recommended for funding*

Proposal recommended for funding*

Proposal not recommended for funding*

Main Arguments Supporting the Funding Recommendation

Briefly comment on each selection criterion

- Project quality
- Applicant's potential
- Quality of host institution
- (if relevant: Interest of the project in the Luxembourg R&D setting)

In case of a Postdoc proposal, a very brief summary is sufficient, as applicants receive the full remote reviews.
Present a justified conclusion addressing conflicting remote reviews.

List of Modifications, Suggested or Mandatory (if applicable):

Suggested modifications:

Mandatory modifications:

* Delete the non-appropriate lines

Annex 3: FNR Review Participation Form

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Please fill in, sign and send back the present form as soon as possible.

Title, Name, First Name	
Institution	
Department	
Position	
Address	
Phone	
Fax	
Email	
Website	

Personal information collected in this declaration will be stored and used by the FNR. It will be made available only to administrators of the FNR and will not be published outside the FNR in individual form.

I herewith agree to provide my services as an expert in the framework of projects and grants evaluation to the Fonds National de la Recherche (FNR) (the "Purpose") and I agree to the present Confidentiality Agreement (the "Confidentiality Agreement").

I have noted that the Confidentiality Agreement can be withdrawn at any moment by an informal message to the FNR.

I shall

- not communicate, disclose or make available all or any part of the Confidential Information that I will receive in the framework of the Purpose (the "Confidential Information") to any third party (for at least 5 years, even after withdrawing from the Confidentiality Agreement);
- not directly or indirectly use, or permit others to use, the Confidential Information other than for the Purpose;
- not make any announcement or disclosure in connection with the Confidential Information or the Purpose without the prior written consent of the FNR;
- inform the FNR of any other special circumstances which are apt to impair confidence in my impartiality;
- acquaint myself and abide by the guidelines for evaluating projects and grants at the FNR, detailed in the Guideline to Peer Review at the FNR (for details, see www.fnr.lu).

The present Confidentiality Agreement shall be governed by the laws of Luxembourg.

Date

Signature

Please print out this form and return it by fax (N° +352 26 19 25 35). If you are unable to participate, please let us know as soon as possible by fax or by email to afr@fnr.lu. Thank you very much in advance for your collaboration.

Please note that you will receive access to the project and/or grant applications to be reviewed as soon as you have returned this signed form to the FNR.

I am an expert in the following field:

Life Sciences (LS)

- | | | |
|-----|--|--------------------------|
| LS1 | Molecular and Structural Biology and Biochemistry | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| LS2 | Genetics, Genomics, Bioinformatics and Systems Biology | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| LS3 | Cellular and Developmental Biology | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| LS4 | Physiology, Pathophysiology and Endocrinology | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| LS5 | Neurosciences and neural disorders | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| LS6 | Immunity and infection | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| LS7 | Diagnostic tools, therapies and public health | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| LS8 | Evolutionary, population and environmental biology | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| LS9 | Applied life sciences and biotechnology | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Mathematics, Physical Sciences, Information and Communication,
Engineering, Universe and Earth Sciences (PE)**

- | | | |
|------|---|--------------------------|
| PE1 | Mathematical foundations | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| PE2 | Fundamental constituents of matter | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| PE3 | Condensed matter physics | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| PE4 | Physical and Analytical Chemical sciences | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| PE5 | Materials and Synthesis | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| PE6 | Computer science and informatics | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| PE7 | Systems and communication engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| PE8 | Products and process engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| PE9 | Universe sciences | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| PE10 | Earth system science | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Social Sciences and Humanities (SH)

- | | | |
|-----|---|--------------------------|
| SH1 | Individuals, institutions and markets | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| SH2 | Institutions, values, beliefs and behaviour | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| SH3 | Environment and society | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| SH4 | The Human Mind and its complexity | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| SH5 | Cultures and cultural production | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| SH6 | The study of the human past | <input type="checkbox"/> |

More specific keywords: