



Hot Tips and Great Hints for Writing an Award Winning Scholarship Application

Where do I apply for funding?

The Faculty of Graduate Studies website lists a number of programs that provide financial awards to graduate students. To search for possible internal (UBC) and/or external sources of funding, please go to www.grad.ubc.ca/prostudents/awards.htm

You should also speak with your supervisor, departmental graduate advisor and your peers about the various awards programs open to students in your particular field of study.



TIPS

- **Some agencies have specific program guidelines. If you are unsure about your eligibility, consult the agency's website. If you still have questions, contact the program officer at the funding agency.**
- **Find out when the deadline is, and give yourself plenty of time. Reviewers can spot a "rush job". Make sure that your application and all supporting documents (e.g., transcripts, letters of support) are received by the funding agency before the competition deadline.**

What makes a winning application?

Visual Appearance

READ THE APPLICATION GUIDELINES AND TAKE THEM SERIOUSLY. Follow all rules concerning font size, line spacing, margins, page limits, etc. Failure to follow the guidelines can result in an ineligible application – pages that exceed the specified limit may be discarded without your knowledge.

Make the application easy to read. Break up the text with paragraphs and white space. Vary the appearance of the printed page by using **boldface** type, underlining, subheadings and indentations, where appropriate. Avoid coloured paper, elaborate fonts or glossy covers – these gimmicks look frivolous and the funding agency may disqualify your application if it cannot be photocopied for reviewers.

Prose Style

Writing must be clear and concise. Remember that the selection committee members may not have a specialized knowledge of your particular area of research. You need to convey to the reviewers the answers to the following questions:

- 1. What issue will the research address?**
- 2. Why is this issue important?**
- 3. What is already known about the issue?**
- 4. How is your approach innovative? How will it advance knowledge in the field?**
- 5. Why are you qualified to carry out the research?**

For most fields of research, you should provide a *testable hypothesis* (i.e., one overriding great idea) and then outline the specific objectives that will be used to address it.

Avoid jargon and technical language – write your proposal for a general audience. Be sure to define any acronyms or abbreviations the first time they are used – reviewers do not want to read about a “TNS” device seven times in a proposal not knowing what it means!

Use short sentences whenever possible. Vary sentence length within paragraphs to avoid monotony. Do not use a big word where a smaller word will do.



TIPS

- **Write your proposal with the specific funding agency and/or review panel in mind.**
- **Ask your supervisor for samples of successful proposals written by other graduate students at UBC.**
- **Ask your supervisor and classmates to critically review your proposal. Give it to someone outside of your specialty area – if it doesn't make sense to them, revise it.**
- **Show how the proposed research will establish a platform for your future work. Describe how the project fits within a program of research.**
- **Be succinct – more is not better.**

The Candidate

Generally, your application will be evaluated in the following three areas:

1. Achievements and Activities – Reviewers will assess your publications, presentations, research prizes and awards. They will evaluate your achievements relative to their expectations for someone at your stage of training.
2. Academic Performance – Undergraduate and graduate transcripts (if available) will be evaluated. Reviewers tend to give credit for steadily improving or consistently good performance.
3. Characteristics and Abilities – Your personal attributes will be assessed based on reports provided by referees. Choose individuals who know you and who are in a position to assess your abilities. Provide your referees with a copy of your proposal and CV as well as detailed instructions (i.e., what's required, deadline for submission, mailing instructions, etc.).

Qualities that should be emphasized in your letters of support include:

critical thinking; independence; perseverance; originality; organizational skills; interpersonal and leadership abilities; interest in discovery; and research ability or potential.



TIPS

- **A good referee has known you for at least two years. If you are applying for an award after completing a graduate degree or during a graduate program, it is important to provide a letter of support from your supervisor.**
- **A good letter of support provides concrete, behaviour-based examples of your strengths and personal attributes.**
- **Check in with your referees about a week before the deadline just to ensure that your reference has not been forgotten.**

The Research Training Environment

Health research funding agencies (e.g., CIHR, Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research) will also consider whether the proposed training environment provides the intellectual challenge and resources required for you to achieve your training goals.

In addition to evaluating your research proposal and personal attributes, the panel will consider the following questions:

1. Is the training environment one in which the candidate will be inspired and challenged?

The research supervisor's scientific productivity and impact (i.e., publication record, significant contributions to research, honours and awards) will be assessed.

2. Are there adequate resources in the training environment to enhance the scientific development of the candidate?

The adequacy of peer-reviewed research funding secured by the research supervisor will be considered, bearing in mind that availability of funding varies among disciplines.

3. What is the likelihood that the candidate will be inspired to continue on in research?

The training record – that is, the number of graduate students and postdoctoral fellows that have trained or are currently training with the supervisor – will be evaluated. Information on the subsequent positions of past trainees (if available) also will be considered. Reviewers do recognize that the opportunity to train students will vary with the length of time since the supervisor completed his or her own research training.



GENERAL TIPS

- **Follow the rules! Read the application form and take it seriously.**
- **Pay attention to the award program's objectives and criteria.**
- **Write clearly. Be succinct. Avoid ambiguities. Check spelling.**
- **Ask your supervisor and peers to critically review your proposal.**
- **Spend time on the application. Make sure it is complete.**



Above all, don't get discouraged. Make the strongest case you can and keep trying. Writing a winning scholarship application is a lot like getting into graduate school and you've made it this far!

This document was compiled from the following sources, with their permission:

Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)
Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC)
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)
The University of Manitoba Office of Research Services
Indiana University Office of Research and University Graduate School
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