

Below are some tips to help you with how to write a strong research proposal. This tip sheet provides only general guidance for a successful scholarship application. Please read the competition information of the specific award(s) you intend to apply for thoroughly, as requirements may differ.

Writing Tips:

- Give yourself as much time as possible.
- You must provide a detailed description of a proposed research project even if your project has not been determined yet (you may change research direction during the course of the award).
- If your degree output is an artistic creation rather than a thesis, does not involve a thesis, a major research paper/essay or a major research project, clearly indicate the research component of your proposed work.
- Begin by setting up necessary headings (see formatting instructions).
- Populate sections in point form as you work.
- Use language appropriate to a non-specialist audience.
- Have a clear title.
- Begin with a powerful statement.
- Leave some white space!
- Ask for examples of other students' proposals.
- Interact with your supervisor.

Introduction/Background:

- Reviewers are very busy & will only devote a small amount of time to each proposal - grab their attention right from the start.
- Use clear, concise language – no jargon and/or acronyms.
- Introduce the problem you are investigating up front.
- Describe progress in the area, from the literature, but also any preliminary work you may have done.
- Explain significance.

Research Question(s)/Hypothesis:

- State your research question/hypothesis/goals in a clearly defined statement.
- Set it apart from the other sections of your proposal so the reviewer can find it easier.
- Be specific.
- Make sure a non-specialist can understand it.

Methodology/Approach:

- Most important section.
- How are you going to address your research question?
- Clear, non-specialist language – explain any field-specific approaches.
- Demonstrate feasibility (state references, talk about preliminary work, work of others in your group); keep time-lines in mind.
- What steps will you take to conduct your study (e.g. methods of data collection or path of argumentation?)
- Consider what will happen if your approach fails/weaknesses in your methods/unexpected results - alternate approaches/mitigation strategies.
- Use confident, enthusiastic language.

Significance/Expected Outcome(s):

- Always good to end with final statement about the importance/significance of your work – IMPACT.
- Don't overstate significance – be realistic about where and who your work will impact the most.
- Keep it "tight" – concise and brief.
- What happens if this problem isn't studied?
- • Who benefits (besides you!) from this study?
- • Why does this matter to the immediate context and beyond?
- • How does your research change the conversation?

Bibliography:

- Use the reference/bibliography style that is typical for your field of study.
- Check instructions - is an extra page allowed, is there a specific format requested?
- Keep in mind very limited space – reference only most important sources

What Reviewers Want to Know Right Away:

- What this research is about?
- What question drives this research proposal?
- The context from which this study emerges?
- That this research addresses an important challenge, problem, persistent issue?
- Who will benefit from this research?
- Why this study is intellectually exciting?

Review/Feedback:

- If there are instructions for reviewers on-line - read them & use them to guide construction/wording of your proposal.
- Go over your proposal outline early on with your supervisor/supervisory committee; incorporate any feedback.
- Solicit feedback on your first draft from MULTIPLE people, with different backgrounds.
- Proofread, spell-check, ensure that proposal is free of typos and grammatical errors

What Not to Do/Common Mistakes:

- Not reading and following application instructions carefully.
- Not starting to write proposal early.
- Dense academic prose (highly technical, esoteric...manage the curse of knowledge).
- Writing that is vague, unfocussed (takes too long for reviewer to figure out what it's about)
- No white space (less is more from reviewers' perspective!)
- Jargon and/or acronyms (excludes reader).
- Research plan/methodology has a "trust me I know what I'm doing" feel – not enough description of how study will be conducted.
- Sloppiness—typos, grammatical errors, etc.