

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION

- (1) Don't leave it too late
- (2) Revise, Revise, Revise
- (3) Add Detail and Be Specific
- (4) Citations
- (5) Concrete, clear and too the point
- (6) Avoid jargon and hard theoretical positions (e.g., do not write a proposal that undermine other people's theoretical interests, take a generous and sensitive approach to writing up the proposal, simply state your theoretical framework and explain why this one. Don't denounce other paradigms or positions in a proposal)
- (7) Give it to your professor to read and comment on (be sure to leave time for that, **see departmental forms and guidelines, handouts**)
- (8) Read the guidelines and follow the basic directions and advice offered by SSHRC

 Be sure, at the very least, to complete the following sections or address the following elements of a good proposal:

1. AIMS OF RESEARCH/RESEARCH QUESTIONS

*what is the purpose of your study

*what will it assess or examine

*how does it link to broader theoretical and empirical interests

*link to broader field in listing aims and describing them

Example: The aims of this project are fourfold:

*identify the research questions which extend outward from the aims

2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

*describe the nature of the problem your aims address

*what is missing or where is the gap in the literature

*what does your study do to address this problem or this gap?

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*identify those theoreticians or bodies of theoretical knowledge you draw from in asking your research questions

*identify key theoretical concepts which are connected to these bodies of knowledge and which will be applied to the present study and be sure to link it to your existing study

*don't extend the number of theories beyond what is reasonable for a doctoral/MA level proposal

4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

*be sure to identify the research methods and related epistemological (knowledge base) traditions you are working within (demonstrates knowledge of the field, not just thrown together)

*provide a specific account of exactly what you will do and HOW you will collect data or conduct some other kind of examination

*give ages of participants, grades, nature of methods, where and what context and why

*try to link back to previous sections on theoretical framework and aims so that everything hangs together well

5. DATA ANALYSIS

*once this data is collected how will it be analysed

*what theoretical/data analytic method will be used and does it fit with your overall framework (**check consistency across sections, very important!!**)

*why this one over any other

*what will be the likely outcome

6. SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

*why is this study important (not just to you or rather not at all to you but to the wider public and the field in which you plan to work in)

*who will benefit and why

*how will they benefit (Canada, cross-national, global) and why is this important

Resource taken from Phil Winne (and adapted), Athabasca (see website: http://www.sfu.ca/ors/Articles/sshrc_p.html). Please do not quote from this document. If citing, refer to the original source at the website address.

© Criteria Used in Judging a Proposal

1. Originality and Contribution to Knowledge

A **program** = Explain your theme/aims and show clearly how it/they link to other themes in the field (e.g., cite and briefly discuss major books, theoretical review articles). Identify the theme's roots, especially in your own prior work. Project your theme's future following the period for which you are now applying.

Originality. Demonstrate knowledge of what has been done in general (e.g., cite major reviews) and of relevant particulars. Analyze specific prior work, including your own, for gaps or miscues in underlying premises, opportunities forgone to collect specific types of data, types of analyses not done, or needs for modest extension and replication. A vital program of research is reflective and corrective.

Contribution. Cite "calls for more research" made in prominent papers of your field and show how your work responds to them. Don't be modest. Write in the first person: "In my prior work on this issue (Myself, 1993), I found that X and Y. These results undermine/ complement/clarify a

significant issue revealed in Eminent and Prominent's (1993) research, that of"

● 2. Suitability of Theoretical Approach

"Suitability" does not convey the notion of what is sought here. Assessors and SSHRC's Committee's are concerned about the extent to which you (a) *have* a theory/framework, (b) *use or challenge* it in your work, and (c) *improve* the theory/framework by conducting your investigation(s).

Two main functions of a theory or conceptual framework are to:

- (a) reveal otherwise implicit elements in a system and
- (b) explain phenomena. Use clear terms (e.g., point-form, diagram) and present a theoretical/conceptual framework to explain what is the "state of the field". Specify how your *program* of research is relevant to examining *and* extending that theory/framework, and show clearly how each study or component of your proposal addresses a specific feature of that theory/framework. Alternatively, what *question(s)* about the theory/framework does your work answer?

3. Appropriateness of research strategy, methodology

Avoid unnecessarily technical terms. It won't impress, and it might frustrate an assessor. Explain the method and show how it addresses the theory/being investigated. For example:

Poor: "An interview will be conducted with each participating teacher."

Better: "The model of classroom environment proposed by Fraser (1991) and supplemented by me (Myself, 1993) will be examined in a 3-phase interview. (1) The interviewer and teacher will watch a video of the previous week's lessons prepared (edited by RAs and me) to show contrasts of student behavior related to the typology outlined in Table 1 (above). Upon conclusion, the interviewer will invite open-ended descriptions about main issues that concern the teacher about classroom environment. (2) For each issue, dimensions proposed by Midgley et al. (1991) will be probed explicitly and the teacher asked to comment. (3) Any topics in Moos' (1991) framework not introduced by the teacher's elaborations in part 2 then will be described, and the cycle in (2) repeated. Sessions will be audiotaped ... "

If there are a series of studies or investigations that use different methods, select one or two as illustrative. The purpose is to demonstrate expertise in (a) methodology per se as well as (b) how to link methodology with the theory/framework that guides your program of research.

Diversity of methodology (multidisciplinarity) is an asset if weaknesses of one approach are compensated by strengths of another when addressing the same or very closely aligned topic. Merely listing diverse methods can convey a lack of clarity about what is addressed in your work.

What Level of Specificity Should the Method Be Pitched At

Keep methodological description at a "medium-general" level. Too many specifics sometimes invites overly specific and unnecessary criticisms. Describe directions your methods will take (e.g.,

"appropriate multivariate techniques such as path analysis" or "passes through the text at levels corresponding to individual and group perspectives") but leave out details. The idea is to guide assessors to fill in the details (because they are experts) and that the assessors recognize as a sophisticated and appropriate methodological approach to your research..

4. Suitability & effectiveness of plans for dissemination

Do not neglect this issue. Consider and present a plan for dissemination that is appropriate for the scholarly community and for the wider professional or lay audience. Workshops, working groups involving key players in schools, newsletters for professionals, and symposia at professional meetings are venues to consider beyond the usual travel to scholarly conferences.

Section by Section Notes

Proposal: Section A12

Topics to address:

- general objectives
- theoretical perspective
- how your research advances the scholarly field
- nature of research strategies/methodological approaches
- relationship to your ongoing research, to current gaps in research or the field/subject of study

In general:

- a Avoid technical terms and phrasing where possible. If you must use a technical term repeatedly,

- define the term or elaborate the phrase where it is first used. Make this exceptionally clear.
- b Elaborate briefly information that a citation conveys. A particular external assessor and SSHRC Panel members may not be acquainted with luminaries in your field and, hence, may not grasp the significance of a citation. For example, "Famous (1994) addressed issues in evaluating applications of advanced computing technologies in education. A main point of his analysis was that a complete evaluation must address more than merely the effect of a computing system on achievement."
 - c Avoid long lists of citations as evidence for your knowledge of the field. Expertise is better conveyed by clear presentation of vital ideas rather than extensive bibliographies.
 - d Don't be overly modest in citing your own work, but show how it *links* to and *adds* to others' work in the field.
 - e Define work that reasonably can be done in a MA/Ph.D. program *and* that links to both prior and future issues in your field.
 - g SSHRC funds *theoretical* and *basic* research. While practical applications or applied research should be briefly noted as outgrowths of your program of research, scholarly/theoretical questions should be define a hub from which applications are arrayed on the rim of your proposal.
 - h Demonstrate the *educational* relevance of your *program* of research. What important educational question or issue is addressed?

◆ Research Contributions

Entries: books, book chapters, articles, reviews of work, "other contributions" (conference presentations if refereed and significant), popularization for the general public. A *few* works "under review" by a journal or accepted for presentation at major conferences can convey a sense of

activity, but too many will appear as padding and suggest a excessive position of "hopefulness" about progress in your program of research. List works "in progress" especially sparinglyÑworks in progress are clear indicators of vital a program of research, so they don't discriminate your track record from others'.

Differentiate scholarly from professional entries. Don't "misrepresent" non-refereed entries as refereed as this can invite questions about your representation of other entries' classifications or about your grasp of what scholarship "means."

Other Contributions to Research

List journal editorial boards, journals reviewed for ad hoc, conference program committees, grants reviewing, service to scholarly associations that reflects your scholarly expertise.

Communication of results. Identify source of quote and date. Name specific scholarly meetings, including dates and locations, and justify why they are appropriate audiences. E.g., "In the last 3 years, the American Educational Research Association's conference has averaged 22 sessions on topic X." Workshops for scholarly peers is a productive venue for communicating results of and gaining input for your research