Writing a Tri-Agency Research Proposal

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SFU GRADUATE STUDIES

Accessibility

Accommodations and accessibility

If you need help completing online application forms because of a disability, contact your institution (scholarship liaison officer, research grant office or other applicant support office) **as early as possible** in the application process to investigate available supports. If your institution cannot provide help, or needs SSHRC to collaborate on a solution, refer to the Accessibility in programs and services webpage for information on requesting assistance or contact accessibility-accessibilite@sshrc-crsh.gc.ca directly. You can also contact SSHRC if you have questions or are seeking specific adaptation arrangements. You do not need to share your medical or sensitive personal information and, to protect your privacy, should avoid doing so.

Frequently requested accommodations include, but are not limited to:

- one-on-one phone or video appointment to clarify funding program information or the application process, or to receive technical support;
- alternative formats of online materials to enable access using assistive technology; and
- submission of the application (in full or part) through alternate means or format (e.g., hard copy, voice recording, or data entry by SSHRC staff on the applicant's behalf).

If submitting a request to accessibility-accessibilite@sshrc-crsh.gc.ca for an adaptive measure, provide:

- your name and institutional affiliation, or the name of the institution submitting the application, as applicable;
- the name of the funding opportunity and its competition deadline;
- the barrier you are encountering; and
- the adaptive measure you are seeking, if known.

https://sshrc-crsh.canada.ca/en/funding/opportunities/canada-graduate-research-scholarships/doctoral-program/2025/competition/instructions/applicant.aspx

Research Proposals: Some General Pointers

- ★ You are not starting from scratch; you are developing/building on the research proposal you submitted when you applied to GS

- ★ The process of writing a proposal should help you sharpen, develop, and clarify your ideas, thinking, methodology, etc. It is not a form you just fill out; it is something you craft.

- ★ Good proposals take time – plan for 3 - 4 drafts
  - ○ Ask your supervisor and peers to read and comment on your draft(s); factor in the time it will take for them to get back to you

- ★ Follow the application instructions carefully

CGRS-Doctoral Evaluation Criteria

Selection criteria

The evaluation of CGRS D applications, whether by institutions or the agencies, is based on the following criteria:

Selection criteria	Description	Weight

Research potential	**Indicators of research potential:**
	• quality of research proposal:
	  ◦ specific, focused and feasible research question(s) and/or objective(s)
	  ◦ clear description and soundness of the proposed methodology
	  ◦ significance and expected contributions to research
	• demonstration of potential to carry out proposed research relative to the stage of study, lived experience and knowledge systems
	• quality of contributions and extent to which they advance the field of research– contributions may include publications, patents, reports, posters, abstracts, monographs, presentations, creative outputs, knowledge translation outputs, community products, etc.
	• demonstration of sound judgment and ability to think critically
	• demonstration of responsible and ethical research conduct, including honest and thoughtful inquiry, rigorous analysis, commitment to safety and dissemination of research results and adherence to professional standards
	• demonstration of originality, initiative, autonomy, relevant community involvement and outreach
	• ability to communicate theoretical, technical and/or scientific concepts clearly and logically in written and oral formats
		50%

CGRS-Doctoral Evaluation Criteria

Relevant experience and achievements obtained within and beyond academia	**Indicators of relevant experience and achievements obtained within and beyond academia:**
	• relevant training, such as academic training, lived experience and traditional teachings
	• scholarships, awards and distinctions (amount, duration, and prestige)
	• academic record:
	  ◦ transcripts
	  ◦ duration of previous studies
	  ◦ program requirements and courses pursued
	  ◦ course load
	  ◦ relative standing in program (if available)
	• professional, academic, and extracurricular activities, as well as collaborations with supervisors, colleagues, peers, students and members of the community, such as:
	  ◦ teaching, mentoring, supervising and/or coaching
	  ◦ managing projects
	  ◦ participating in science and/or research promotion
	  ◦ participating in community outreach, volunteer work, and/or civic engagement
	  ◦ chairing committees and/or organizing conferences and meetings
	  ◦ participating in departmental or institutional organizations, associations, societies and/or clubs
		50%

CIHR https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/54347.html

Research project summary (maximum 1 page including graphs and images for English applications and a maximum of 1.5 pages for French applications)

Note: For research project summaries submitted in English, any pages over the 1-page limit will be removed with no further notification to the Nominated Principal Applicant.

The research project summary must:

- clearly describe the applicant's role on the project.
- be written in general scientific language, which is an important skill to acquire for future success in the research environment as applications are being reviewed by multi-disciplinary committees.
- be specific, focused, include feasible research question(s), objective(s) and provide a clear description of the proposed methodology.

Applicants whose proposed research respectfully involves and engages with Indigenous communities must ensure that it fulfills the pillars for respectful research engaging with Indigenous Peoples. The research project summary should reflect that the applicant and the supervisor are aware of and referring to relevant principles and protocols established for this kind of research, such as, following the Principles of OCAP® (i.e., ownership, control, access and possession/protection), the CARE principals(alongside FAIR principles: Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) or other principles of Indigenous self-governance as appropriate.

NSERC https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/OnlineServices-ServicesEnLigne/instructions/201/pgs-pdf_eng.asp

Outline of proposed research: two pages maximum

- Provide a detailed yet concise description of your proposed research project for the period during which you are to hold the award. Be as specific as possible. Provide background information to position your proposed research within the context of the current knowledge in the field. State the significance of the proposed research to a field or fields in the NSE [Natural Sciences and Engineering]. State the objectives and hypothesis and outline the experimental or theoretical approach to be taken (citing literature pertinent to the proposal) and the methods and procedures to be used.

  In addition:

- Your research must be in the NSE.
- You should not repeat the information found in the Theses completed or in progress page, but you may refer to it.
- Include all relevant information in the outline. Do not refer review committee members to URLs or other publications for supplemental information. Such additional information will not be reviewed.
- If the proposed research is a continuation of your thesis, clearly state the differences between work done for your thesis and the research activities outlined in this proposal.
- Write your proposal in clear, plain language and avoid jargon. Your application will be evaluated by a review committee covering a broad discipline category.
- NSERC expects you to write your research proposal independently and to properly reference ideas or text belonging to others. [When and how can AI be used?]
- NSERC encourages you to seek feedback from colleagues and supervisors.

SSHRC

Research proposal: Maximum two pages

Write your proposal in clear, plain language. Avoid discipline-specific jargon, acronyms and highly technical terms. Your application will be reviewed by members of a multidisciplinary selection committee, not all of whom will be familiar with your area of research.

Ensure that your text includes the following required elements, especially with respect to your research proposal.

If you are not currently enrolled in a doctoral degree program:

- clearly state your current level of study;
- give the title and a brief description of your master's thesis or research project, if applicable;
- identify the degree program you will pursue, including any relevant courses, and explain why you chose this program; and
- provide an outline of your doctoral thesis or research project, including the research question(s), context, objectives, methodology, significance and expected contribution to advancing knowledge, as well as your special interests in the proposed research area.

If you are currently enrolled in a doctoral degree program:

- clearly state your current level of graduate study;
- indicate what stage you are at in your thesis/research project;
- provide the name of your supervisor of doctoral studies, if known;
- provide an outline of your thesis or research project, including, for example, the research question(s), context, objectives, methodology, significance and expected contributions to advancing knowledge; and
- describe what you hope to accomplish during the award tenure and what will remain for you to complete to obtain your degree.

CGS Master's Evaluation Criteria

Criteria	Value/Weight
Academic Excellence	50%
Research Potential	**30%**
Personal/Interpersonal Skills and Characteristics	20%

CGS-M Indicators: Research Potential (30%)

As demonstrated by your research history, your interest in discovery, the proposed research, its potential contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the field and any anticipated outcomes

Indicators of research potential:

- quality and originality of contributions to research and development
- relevance of work experience and academic training to field of proposed research
- significance, feasibility and merit of proposed research
- judgment and ability to think critically
- ability to apply skills and knowledge
- initiative and autonomy
- research experience and achievements relative to expectations of someone with your academic experience

The Path to a Research Question:
From Broad Topic to a Specific Question

What is your research question?

Take a moment to write down your research question in a single sentence. Feel free to refer to your grad school application.

Note the Use of Subheadings (2 pp Doctoral App)

SSHRCC Proposal

Dissertation Title: "The Play's the Thing!" Ideology, Entertainment and Conflict
Supervised by: [redacted]
Current level of study: Third year doctoral student

> It is now clear that the coming decades will be defined by a war in the shadows […] This enduring battlefield will have no definable frontiers, no apparent or visible enemies and these battles will be waged not only physically but also ideologically […] This will be the ultimate and decisive challenge in the global war on terrorism.[1]

According to Statistics Canada, hate crime in Canada - defined as attacks on individuals based primarily on their association with a given group - increased by 35% between 2007 and 2008.[2] The three most targeted groups were Jews, Blacks and Muslims.[3] Vancouver had the highest rates of hate crimes of any major city in Canada.[4] Canada is not alone in this increase - rates of Anti-Semitism and Islamaphobia, for example, are increasing worldwide. These increases are not surprising in a world experiencing increasing ideological terrorism and conflict, with hate crimes representing on an individual level what terrorism represents on a national and international level - ideological conflict.

Research Question: To what extent can entertainment inspire audiences to question beliefs, attitudes and prejudices that commonly relate to ideological conflicts and hate crimes?

Research Objectives: This research has two primary objectives: to design an entertainment event which addresses and counters cultural, religious and ideological images common to acts of prejudice, hate, and ideological conflict. The second objective is to evaluate the ability of that production to inspire discussion, debate and questions relating to these ideological issues. For example: the perception that a group is inferior; manipulative; aggressive; a threat; or should be destroyed.

Theoretical Framework: In the 20th century, the use of theatre for social or political change spread across the world from Brecht in Germany,[5] to Boal in South America.[6] Some artists, notably South African artists like Athol Fugard, Pieter Dirk-Uys and Mbongeni Ngema have emphasised the popular appeal of socially relevant theatre, in addition to its social or political content. Their work provides one foundation for this research. Additionally, entertainment is already being used to inspire discussion and

F Feasible

A good research question is feasible, which means that the question is well within the researcher's ability to investigate. Researchers should be realistic about the scale of their research as well as their ability to collect data and complete the research with their skills and the resources available to them. It's also wise to have a contingency plan in place in case problems arise.

I Interesting

The ideal research question is interesting not only to the researcher but also to their peers and community. This interest boosts the researcher's motivation to see the question answered.

N Novel

Your research question should be developed to bring new insights to the field of study you are investigating. The question may confirm or extend previous findings on the topic you are researching, for instance.

E Ethical

This is one of the more important considerations of making a research question. Your research question and your subsequent study must be something that review boards and the appropriate authorities will approve.

R Relevant

Aside from being interesting and novel, the research question should be relevant to the scientific community and people involved in your area of study. If possible, your research question should also be relevant to the public's interest.

-Hulley et al. (2007)

General Versus Specific

WEAK Research Qs

Does training for parents on road safety practices reduce child and infant injury and death rates?

STRONG Research Qs

Will one-hour hands-on car seat training sessions reduce child motor vehicle injuries in Winnipeg?

From York University:

A well-organized research statement typically includes the following components (often but not necessarily in this order):

1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Provide background for your research topic. Situate your proposed research in relation to a topic of general interest that will immediately grab a reader's attention (current issues, health, environment, immigration, etc.). Keep it relatively brief (1-2 paragraphs, depending on the overall length of the proposal).

2

RESEARCH TOPIC AND SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Be clear and specific. Explicitly outline your research questions early in the statement.

3

OBJECTIVES AND JUSTIFICATION

Why is your proposed study important? What gap in current knowledge does it aim to address? What impact will answering this research question have on the field, on the community, on the world?

4

LITERATURE/RESEARCH CONTEXT

Reference the most important scholarly literature on the topic in order to set your topic, question, and justification in its proper context. The context demonstrates that you know the terrain of your field and the area in which you seek to make an original contribution. It also provides non-specialist adjudicators with necessary background and context.

5

RESEARCH METHOD (MAY INCLUDE HYPOTHESES OR A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE)

It is critical that the research method you have selected demonstrates your superior research ability, potential and vision. It must be appropriate to your field and project, and it must also come across to adjudicators as realistic and doable. Adjudicators are looking to see if your method allows you to effectively answer your research questions within the scope of a thesis or dissertation. In social science research, the research method may be framed in a particular theoretical perspective. In science research, the methodology may be preceded by hypotheses.

6

CONTRIBUTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Indicate the significance and/or implications of the research. Why are you pursing answers to this research question, and why do those answers matter? To what or whom do they matter, and what will change—in the field, in the community, in the world—once you've answered this question?

To put it differently, any compelling proposal has to provide a clear description of the following:

THE WHAT

The argument. What exactly are you proposing to investigate?

THE WHERE

In which context(s)? Readers need to understand the fit with the field.

THE WHY

Rationale or justification for why such an investigation/idea should/must be proposed, i.e., what is lacking in the field currently?

THE SO WHAT

The significance of the argument and what it proposes. Why does your research matter and in what ways?

THE HOW

Methodology—what you are going to do to answer the proposed questions? Why have you chosen this method (which can be related to "where" in the field, i.e., what else has been done already in the field?)

A clear statement of any skills and qualifications possessed or required essential to your methodology; for instance, you may describe your previous research and training, language requirement, equipment/facility, or access to research participants, all of which should show that you are well equipped to undertake the project.

From York University

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Know your audience

Not necessarily in your discipline therefore:

- avoid jargon, specialized language, explain concepts and methods so that they can be understood by a non-specialist

- the scholarship-writing genre is unique; this is not an essay or thesis. Write in a journalistic style that emulates a magazine pitched to a specialist audience.

Common Errors

- Wrote too much under the background section, should not be more than 1/3 of the page.
- Methodology is weak – not enough information on how the research will be carried and whether it's feasible within the time period of their study.
- Too much jargon or too technical – the proposal needs to be written in a lay person language

Additional Resources

SFU FGS Document Library (examples of successful proposals)

How to Write a Research Proposal (University of Guelph)

How to Write a Research Question

SSHRC Proposal Writing Tips

SFU Library Writing Services for Graduate Students

Final Words of Advice

> Writing is the art of applying the ass to the seat.
>
> — *Dorothy Parker*