

Grant-Writing Workshop

- General Principles for Grant or Project Proposals
- Our case study: the SSHRC doctoral application
- Attachments:
 - 1. Program of Study
 - 2. Bibliography and Citations
 - 3. Research Contributions
- Reference Letters
- The Final Step

General Principles for Grant or Project Proposals

1. Follow the instructions *to the letter*, from font and margins to deadlines
2. Aim your project description at your audience:
 - Don't "dumb things down"
 - BUT, recognize that what you take for granted (terms, dates, scholarly approaches) may well not be familiar to your readers.
3. Ensure you've done a thorough literature review (i.e., a survey of published research on the topic).
4. Ensure your writing is impeccable:
 - no typos
 - no errors (of attribution, of fact)
 - clear all the way through
5. If a budget is required, make it reasonable: best tools for the job at the best price; no more than what's required for the research. And explain why it's required.

Why? Committees have limited budgets and large numbers of applications, and have to make hard choices. Don't give them an easy reason to discard your application—typos, inadequate research reviews, unreasonable budgets, etc. are all easy reasons to drop an application into the "roundfile."

Grant Writing: The New Growth Industry

- SSHRC is only one among many federal granting agencies directed at academics and more generally at cultural industries; and there are also several provincial grants and private agencies. Grants cover graduate students; postdoctoral positions; faculty; citizens; NGOs and NFPs, and so on.
 - Federal: SSHRC; the other “tri-council” agencies (with SSHRC, also NSERC and CIHR); Canada Council for the Arts; Canada Foundation for Innovation
 - Provincial: [Nova Scotia Graduate Scholarships](#)
- Sometimes other nations have grants that Canadians can be part of (just as SSHRC has “partnership” grants that people from other countries can be part of)
- All of this means that grant writing is a standard—even hegemonic—function of the university system, and of larger work in the social and cultural industries most of you will end up working in.
- Nearly all of the advice given here is the same for research-related applications in general.

SSHRC

Grant Writing Case Study

Graduate students, faculty, culture workers have been completing (and complaining about!) these applications exactly forever and a day

It might seem mysterious now but it's just a new genre for many of you, so it just takes a bit of practice.

Once you figure this out, putting together other applications will be easier.



Applying to SSHRC: Pro and ~~Con~~ Pro

PRO

- A PhD SSHRC is worth \$20,000/year for up to 4 years; a CGS (PhD) is worth \$35,000/year for up to 3 years;
- A record of grants success can improve your chances on future graduate and any other research grant applications;
- **Grant-writing is a marketable skill:** the ability to argue for a project clearly and effectively is important in any number of jobs; more specifically, grant-writing itself is a growing profession.

~~CON~~ PRO

- It does take a *lot* of time and care.
 - **However**, you can use your proposal as the basis for graduate-school applications, and practice (and success) at grant writing is itself a valued skill
- The success rate is quite low: at the PhD level, traditionally, about 50% will be forwarded to Ottawa and around a third to half of those will be funded (of those, maybe 1 or 2 will get a CGS-PhD).
 - **However**, even if your application is unsuccessful, you can learn from the process and do **better in the next year's competition or other grant competitions. Remember: everything's part of your learning curve.**

Note: if you're a PhD student, eligible for SSHRC, and don't yet have one, you are **required to apply.**

What Assessors are Looking For

PROGRAM OF STUDY & BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A well-conceptualized and critically well-situated, feasible research project
- A coherent course of study suitable to the selected graduate program
- Effective and knowledgeable academic writing—the program of study is, in key respects, a writing sample.

THE REST

- Consistently high grades, esp. in your area of study
- Supportive reference letters that make specific points about your accomplishments and future potential
- **For 2nd-year and up PhDs:** evidence of professionalization and wider engagement with the academy:
 - conference papers; publications; etc. Bonus marks if you have these earlier, but it's not expected.
- Previous awards (essay prizes, department prizes, scholarships): not required to be ranked highly, but they are considered.

SSHRC Essentials

- Go to www.sshrc.ca, click “Funding,” then click “Talent Program.”
- Scroll down to find a list of the competitions:
 - the top two doctoral competitions use the same form at the same time, so ignore the different names. **We’ll go through this in more detail after the PowerPoint**
- **Also IGNORE** what SSHRC says about deadlines—that’s *the university’s* deadline for forwarding applications, *not yours*.
- **The departmental deadline this year (2016) is November 1st.**

Your To-Do List

■ Tasks to do right away:

- Read everything on the SSHRC site about your application, especially the form and the instructions (top-bar menu);
- Order all transcripts;
- Fill out as much of the form as you can: it's time-consuming, so get it out of the way. But **do not** click "submit" until you're sure everything is final close to the deadline—your project title might change, for instance, as you work on the attachments. Best to get a thumbs up from someone before you "submit."

■ Tasks to start a.s.a.p.:

- Drafting the proposal and other attachments;
- Deciding who to ask for reference letters.
 - Choose a mentor or preferably two to advise you as you work on the proposal
- Referees need a copy of your plan of study to write their letters, so you need a polished version of that written and polished by mid-October or so.
- **You should have as polished a proposal as possible ready for the October 13 SSHRC "speed-vetting" event**

Also, please note: the SSHRC site **WILL**, 100% for sure **CRASH** around the time of big deadlines. You want this done *early*.

Attachments 1

Program of Study

Program of Study:
Showing your readers
that you have a well-
conceptualized plan for
all of the work you will
do with SSHRC support.



Image credit:
<http://www.catchdacraze.com/episode8o.html>

- **You are not alone**
 - talk to people as you write; find mentors among faculty and senior students
 - once you have a draft, take it to your mentors for advice.
- **Start early**, and expect to have to research your topic (and possible graduate schools if you're applying to those as well) and to do a *lot* of revising.
- **Do not worry** about committing yourself to a project: this is a test of your academic ability and potential, *not a contract*. (Note: this is specific to SSHRC. Other grant programs may differ.)
- ***Follow all instructions*** (see [Instructions link at the top of the forms page—print it off, keep it on your desk, and check your work against it regularly](#)):
 - SSHRC is an impersonal bureaucracy which awards only a chosen few. Don't give them a reason to ignore you.
 - So, 2 pages for the proposal; up to five for the Bibliography
 - Properly formatted: proper MLA style; at least 3/4" margins; 12pt Times New Roman; 6 lines per inch; numbered pages; etc.

Step 1: You and Your Specialization

- a research project (dissertation)
- that project fits into area of specialization (e.g. traditional period of national literature; body of theory) so you can establish your developing expertise in the area to work on that project.
- project also needs to a manageable amount of material.

Examples:

- **Area:** Renaissance; **Project:** Spenser's sonnets
- **Area:** 18th-c. British lit.; **Project:** sentimental novels of the 1750s
- **Area:** British modernism; **Project:** Virginia Woolf's novels
- **Area:** Postcolonial literature; **Project:** Rushdie's early fiction
- **Area:** Critical Race Studies; **Project:** 21st-century speculative fiction

Step 2: You and Your Methodology

- You need to establish approach or conceptual framework (e.g. formalism; (new) historicism; feminism; queer theory; postcolonial theory; semiotics; cultural studies; and so on.
- Approach will determine your rationale for your choice of texts, and how you will examine them and hence answer crucial questions.
- Conversely, you may like a certain approach/theory that lends itself to a certain set of texts

Examples:

Project: Spenser's sonnets; **Approach:** formalism

Project: sentimental novels of the 1750s; **Approach:** cultural studies

Project: Virginia Woolf's novels; **Approach:** Feminism

Project: Rushdie's early fiction; **Approach:** Postcolonial and globalization theory

Step 3: Putting it together

General advice:

- a) Show don't tell. Show your readers that you know what you're talking about by saying smart, specific things, and citing key works of scholarship to show you've done the lit-review (survey of research) to know what is significant and what has already been covered.
- b) Revise, revise, revise: make sure everything is well-written, typo-free, names are spelt properly, and everything is properly cited. All quotations (even 1- or 2-word phrases) must be in quotation marks, with clear indications of the source as per MLA.

And onto structure... The following looks rigid, but it is designed as *one* model: we'll talk about how to juggle it.

Paragraph 1

Briefly introduce yourself as a developing expert in an area who has a clear idea for a project. Example:

I am currently completing my M.A. at Dalhousie University, developing my specialization in Nineteenth-Century British Literature. I have taken core classes in this area at the undergraduate level, and this year I am taking two graduate seminars on this subject as well as further expanding my knowledge of literary history in general. This will prepare me well for my doctoral research and specifically my dissertation, tentatively titled “‘Before his Face’: Spectacles of Violence in Victorian Fiction Before the Crimean War.”

Paragraph 2

- Indicate how your graduate work to date and this coming year prepare you for the work you will do during the period of the proposed award, and what you will be doing for the remainder of your degree.
- E.g., 1st-year PhD students might indicate how the MA has prepared them for the PhD, which classes they are currently taking, which comps will be taken in the first year of the award, and how it all connects to the dissertation.

Paragraph 3-7

(or 3-8, but maybe not 3-9 or more...)

The research project: why you chose your texts; what your approach will be; how it connects to scholarship to date; what your chapter arrangement might be.

Example:

- Para 3: an expanded description of your general topic: what questions/issues are you going to explore, and why?
- Para 4: how your selection of a particular period and/or author(s) and/or text(s) will help you achieve the aims of para 3
- Para 5: the “for-instance” paragraph: discuss one text in some detail in terms of your approach to give your readers an idea of what your thesis/project might look like
- Para 6-7 or 6-8: chapter descriptions (about 2-3 sentences per chapter-- three chapters for an MA thesis, about six for a PhD diss.). There’s room, especially early in the PhD, for being more detailed about early chapters and vaguer (and briefer) about later ones.

Project description

The more sophisticated the approach and discussion of the state of scholarship in the area, the better.

A good PhD-applicant proposal will introduce a project on terms like this:

While readings of William Wordsworth's poetry in recent years have drawn on eco-criticism (see, e.g., Bate, McKusick, Pinkney), there has been less attention to Coleridge's writings in this context despite long-standing interest in his organicist model of verse (for important exceptions, see Hong-Sang Yeo and McKusick, "Coleridge"). Drawing on McKusick's notion of "green Romanticism," my project, "Green Coleridge," will argue that Coleridge's organicist model of poetry, especially as outlined in the *Biographia Literaria*, not only resists eighteenth-century mechanistic ideas but also draws on contemporary notions of nature and debates about enclosures and the loss of green spaces.

2nd-last paragraph: choice of university

To enter a new program

- Explain your reasons for choosing a particular university (you're not committed to going there).

Example:

The University of the Centre of the Universe is the ideal place for me to pursue this research. It has considerable faculty strengths in my area, including Professor Multiple Monographs, Professor Major Essays, and Professor Up N. Coming. It also has excellent library resources, including key databases in my field.

Continuing PhD students

- Don't have to justify your choice so much, but can include something like this:

At the University of the Centre of the Universe, I am working with Professor National Expert, as my dissertation supervisor, and am able to draw on the wider expertise of my committee, which includes Professors B. Brainiac and C. Sixbooks. Library resources at UCU are excellent, and the Interlibrary Loan department extremely helpful for those few items which are not immediately available.

- It will help you get to major conferences in your field (name a couple that are coming up, or an annual one that is particularly central to your area) where you can get further feedback on early drafts of your dissertation chapters;
- It will help you with any necessary archive travel (only use this if it's clearly required by your diss. project);
- It will help you spend more time on your studies and so ensure timely completion of your degree.

Your choice of university might flow better in your second paragraph; talking about your coursework might make sense after you've introduced your research project in some depth. Do what works best for you to make your case.

But the first paragraph "this is my expertise" and the final paragraph "this is why I'll use the money well" are pretty standard, and the first paragraph really has to be first so that the readers have context for the rest.

- **Don't make personal remarks:** this is about your academic qualifications and potential, and the merits of your research and course of study. **Big No-no's:** "I worked summers for the post office so I know the value of hard work" or "I have always loved the power of the written word."
- **Don't make hyperbolic claims:** Writing "I will change the way we read Shakespeare" or "No one has ever adequately considered the problem of history in Walter Scott's novels" will do the *opposite* of persuading your readers that you have a feasible project and you have a good sense of the scholarship in these areas.
- **Don't be sloppy:** check for typos, make sure you've spelled everyone's names properly, check your dates, etc.

- Include your primary sources. If you have an author available in multiple editions, this is your chance to show that you know what the “best” edition is—it’s all part of establishing that you have the relevant expertise.
- Use proper MLA style—you want to look professional and well-trained, not sloppy.
- Don’t put together five pages if you only need three to make your case.
- Single-space throughout (no spacing between entries), and learn how to use the “hanging paragraph”: it’ll save you a lot of trouble when you change margins. (And not just here—it will save you hours of stress when you’re finishing your MA thesis or dissertation or any other large document...)

- About 1 in 10 1st-year PhD applicants have publications and/or conference papers, so it's great if you've got it--but do *not* worry if you don't.
- *But get going on it*: by 2nd year, about half of applicants will have this page—by 3rd year, most will.
- No but srsly tho. Even if you get a SSHRC early in the PhD, *get going on it*: you'll need a well-established publication record when you hit the (*terrible*) academic job market, and it takes time to learn how to write conference papers, revise essay submissions, etc., and the process from submission to acceptance, even when it's straightforward and no revisions are required, can take a year or more.

Research Contributions: Nuts and Bolts

- Follow the formatting requirements to the letter. Proper MLA, indicate whether it's refereed (if you got reports, it's refereed; if you didn't, it isn't), etc.
- Show that you know enough about the academy to know what belongs here: conference papers and publications. Not your MA thesis, not a graduate-class seminar presentation, not a guest lecture in the class you TA'd for. **If in doubt, ASK a faculty member.**
- If you only have one item, don't omit the page because you don't think it's worthwhile to include it. One item is much better than nothing!

Research Contributions: Examples

Other Refereed Contributions

Porter, James, and William Preston. "On the Attempted Landings of the French Fleet." Annual conference of the Eighteenth-Century Ireland Society. Trinity College Dublin, 22-24 June 2012.

Porter, James. "Pithy Quotation, Full Colon, and Description of My Project." Citationality in the Digital Age: From Negativland to Marvel Movies. University of Toronto, 22-24 April 2011.

Non-Refereed Contribution

Porter, James. Rev. of William Drennan's *Letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt*. *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 42 (1985): 52-54.

Forthcoming Contribution

Porter, James. "Billy Bluff and the 'Squire: What I Meant by the Weird Allegory at the End." *English Language Notes*, forthcoming in 2013 (1200 words).

Asking for
Reference Letters

It Doesn't Have to
Feel Like This ↓

Image credit: Matt Groening, of
course.



- Give reference-letter writers ***at least two weeks***
 - they need two weeks for the paperwork, to read any materials you give them, etc. Two weeks is considered the polite minimum.
- **Give them your program of study** (pretty much required by SSHRC) and ask if there's anything else they'd like to see.
 - A referee might want to see a copy of your transcripts, for instance, or a copy of that paper that s/he marked so highly a year ago.
- **Read the signals:**
 - if you sense ***real*** hesitation or the professor says "I'm not sure I'm the best person"—**FLEE**. Be prepared with a gracious parting excuse, e.g., "sure, I understand—thanks for talking to me about it." But **FLEE**. It doesn't happen often, but when it does you need to read the signals—you want enthusiastic recommendations.
 - Many (most?) of us will be direct with you about this.

Picking Referees: What you Want

1. Someone who knows your recent work
 - ideally someone who has seen your work in the last year
 - can speak to your preparedness for the next level
 - If you've done an M.A. thesis, your supervisor is the best person to ask
 - if you've already got a dissertation supervisor, ask him/her.
 - Try not to go further back than two years.
2. Someone who is familiar with scholarship competitions.
 - You want someone who knows to write about your fantastic essay and other classwork in terms of your research and writing skills, as well as potential and originality, not wander off-point to say you have teaching potential or were always in class on-time.

- **Don't hesitate to ask whoever is best for *your* application**
 - relevant expertise (on your work and the area of the dissertation project)
 - strong sense of how to write for SSHRC
 - indicates s/he will write you a strong letter.
- **Remember**
 - it's part of our jobs to write reference letters
 - it's **great** to see our students get SSHRCs
 - This is for the big bucks, so don't let nervousness or misguided politeness get in your way.
 - *So, don't hesitate to ask whoever you think will write you the best letter.* The worst s/he can do is say "no."

Final Step: Forgetting about SSHRC (SSHRC who?)

- Once you've finished the online form, verified it, and everything is formally submitted to the department: **put it out of your mind.**
 - You won't hear until March or April, at best, and the odds are long, so **get on with your studies and your plans and your life as if there's no such thing as SSHRC.**
 - This is true of any grant application, but especially federal ones which tend to take more time than you'd think...
- **One exception**
 - if you're in, or planning on beginning, a PhD, think about that Research Contributions page and talk to your supervisor and/or other faculty about how best to proceed!

And now, onto www.sshrc.ca . . .