

How to make your scholarship application shine



Janice Eng, PhD

Professor & Associate Dean

UBC Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

Canada Research Chair in Neurological Rehabilitation



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies



Typical Scholarship Weighting

- Academic excellence – PhD 30% Master 50%
- Research ability/potential – PhD 50% Master 30%
- Communication, interpersonal, leadership abilities – 20%

The Reviewers

- Topics range from A to Z, multi-disciplinary, different methodologies
- One primary & one secondary reviewer
- Likely not experts in your topic
- Lots of reviews and little time

Your neighbour should be able to understand your application and be excited about it





Be clear and specific

- Write short sentences and keep it simple.
- “My main objective is to quantify the mechanical response of [.....]. To attain this objective, I have three specific aims. These studies will define the role of”
- Use strong, active verbs, such as “is” and “will”.
- “These studies will enhance our understanding of ...”
- “To identify I will...”
- “The research is designed to...”



Be clear and specific

- Use transition words.
- “Furthermore”, “Additionally” and “In contrast”
- Minimize the use of acronyms.
- Use all space provided!



Have others review your application

- Have a colleague or friend read your application for readability / grammar/ typos
- Do they get excited about the work or get the sense of importance from the way you wrote it
- Put together a scholarship writing club
 - Use peers to review different pieces from each other once a week running up to the deadline
 - Invite a faculty member to provide tips at one of the sessions

Get as many eyes on your application as possible





Proposed Research (typically 1 or 2 pages)

- Must be easy to read and explain technical terms
- Objectives / research hypothesis provided
- Project fits your background but challenges or extends your skillset
- Needs to be ‘stand-alone’, easy-to-read, and to capture the interest of reviewers and show potential for impact.
- “Do-ability” (describe time frame, resources)

Must be detailed, not vague

**Comment complaint: “Not sure what they are going to do”
“I’m not convinced this is feasible”**



Headers are helpful for proposals

- Background:
 - Why is this needed?
- Purpose and Hypothesis:
- Methods
 - Research design
 - Sampling/Theory
 - Measures/Experiments
 - Analysis strategy
 - Limitations
- Significance/Impact

Qualitative studies might use alternative headings such as Theoretical context, framework for analysis

CV Productivity



If they allow, and if there is space...

Define your role

“As the first author, I conceptualized the paper, collected and analyzed the data, wrote the first draft with input from my supervisory committee”

“I took existing data, but developed the methodology for the paper, wrote the first draft and completed the 2 major revisions required by the journal we submitted to.”

“As 3rd author, I contributed to the data collection and provided input to the final draft.”

Emphasize importance of productivity if you think the reviewers might not know to value it “In my field of XX, conference proceedings (..sole author book chapter) are highly valued...”

Academic, research & other relevant work experience



Define your role

Microsoft intern: Analysis of big data to drive improvements in the end to end execution system times; provided training of system to one new staff engineer

Teaching Assistant: Supervised undergraduate course labs; tutored students in office hours, graded assignments and exams; developed new lab content (3 hours) in XXXX.

Graduate Research Assistant: Developed and administered surveys to.....Analyzed survey data to .. Produced final report for...



References/Sponsors

- Used to judge characteristics and abilities of the candidate
- Helps to corroborate your points on leadership and research impact
- Typically free-form letter or letter and ratings
- Get instructions for referee letter so you know what info to feed your referees



Training Expectation/Applicant Statement

- **Logical description of experiences that contributed to development of interest in research**
 - Must show that each experience logically builds and leads to next experience and has benefit to your development as a researcher
 - Introduced to research as a summer student (acquired skills in...)
 - Exposure to practical challenges in industry/work/4th year (acquired skills in) led to an interest in research. Undertook directed studies with..
 - Led to Master's program where I developed an important research topic, developed expertise in XXX and presented early results at conferences. Mentors strongly encouraged me to continue to PhD to develop complementary skills in...and address research gaps in...



Sample Reference Requirements

To help explain your ratings, provide specific examples of the candidate's behaviour with respect to each characteristic in Part A: Critical thinking; Independence; Perseverance; Originality; Organizational skills; Interest in discovery; Research ability; and Leadership ability.



Sample Reference Requirements

Your Letter of Appraisal should inform the selection committee about the following:

- the candidate's background preparation, originality, judgement, written and oral skills, and skill at research;
- the proposal's theoretical framework, its relation to the field, and its methodology;
- the merits and shortcomings of both the candidate and the program of study;
- the importance to the discipline of the journals in which the candidate has published and/or the candidate's prospects for publication;
- the appropriateness of the institution that will award the degree; and,
- if applicable, the candidate's proficiency in the foreign language(s) necessary to pursue the program of study.



Sample Reference Requirements

Academic Excellence

As demonstrated by past academic results, transcripts, awards and distinctions.

Rating: Top 2% Top 5% Top 10% Top 25% Below Top 25% Unable to comment

Provide an assessment of the applicant's skills, abilities, achievements, awards, experience and contributions related to this criterion. Use concrete examples.

Research Potential

As demonstrated by the applicant's research history, his/her interest in discovery, the proposed research, its potential contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the field, and any anticipated outcomes.

Rating: Top 2% Top 5% Top 10% Top 25% Below Top 25% Unable to comment

Provide an assessment of the applicant's skills, abilities, achievements, awards, experience and contributions related to this criterion. Use concrete examples.

Personal Characteristics and Interpersonal Skills

As demonstrated by the applicant's past professional and relevant extracurricular interactions and collaborations.

Rating: Top 2% Top 5% Top 10% Top 25% Below Top 25% Unable to comment

Provide an assessment of the applicant's skills, abilities, achievements, awards, experience and contributions related to this criterion. Use concrete examples.

A CV is not sufficient to answer these questions



Selecting your referees

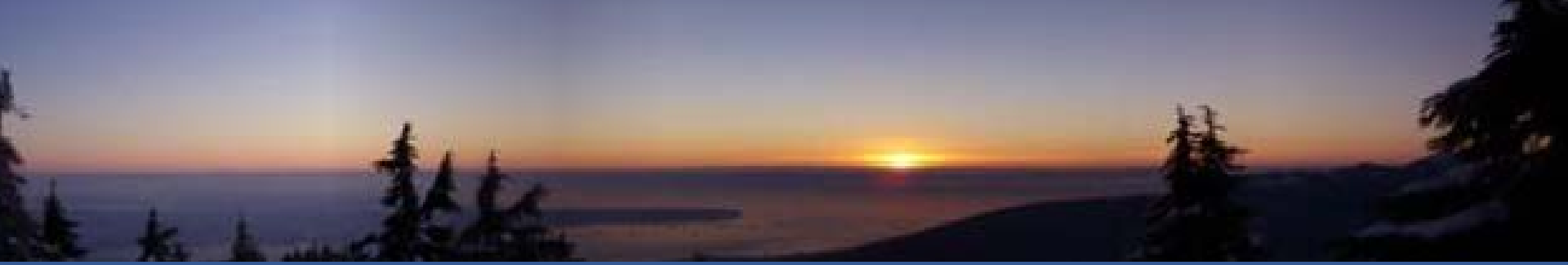
- Select sponsors carefully
 - Need to describe you well, provide them with CV
 - Provide them with text summarizing accomplishments and examples to match what is asked for (if you have energy, then make 2 slightly different versions)
 - Give 6 weeks time to complete – Manage your referees!

- Honest appraisal
 - Comments must match ratings
 - Ratings should be consistent
 - Examples are a must



Leadership and community outreach

- Typically this is extracted from the relevant activities and referee report
- Leadership activity is weighted much higher than participation activity – prefer sustained activity (more than 1 year)
- Activity can be work experience, volunteerism, mentor, conference organizer, grad rep, sports
- Describe and clarify your role
- You helped at a foodbank- Did you serve food or did you organize three volunteers as a team
- You helped with highschool science career events – Did you develop the content, did you approach the school?
- You are on the Grad Student Executive – Do you organize a conference or orientation events
- Ideal if reference letters corroborate these activities



Questions