

# Department of Mathematics and Statistics

## 10 Helpful Hints for Preparing a Successful Scholarship Application

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- 1. Apply.** If you are eligible and satisfy the selection criteria for a scholarship, apply. In particular, all eligible students are *expected* to apply for NSERC funding (September for PhD, November for MSc), and all doctoral students are again *expected* to apply to the University's Open Doctoral Awards competition (usually in January). There are lots of other scholarship opportunities; this includes industrially co-sponsored awards such as NSERC Industrial Postgraduate Scholarships and MITACS. At the time of writing, these two programs are very much undersubscribed and have success rates of 90% and higher. Be sure to talk to your supervisor about applying for any scholarship.
- 2. Read and follow the instructions.** Yes, it sounds obvious, but oftentimes the instructions are lengthy or complicated, and there is a temptation to just skim or even skip them. Don't give in to that temptation. Read them carefully and follow them! Triple-check that your application is complete before you submit it.
- 3. Information.** Get as much information as possible. Attend the relevant workshops offered by the Faculty of Graduate Studies, the Department, or scholarship organizations. Oftentimes a scholarship organization offers tips for writing good applications; follow them. There is a wealth of internet resources (google "scholarship", for example documents like this one. Two good websites (the second of which I partially plagiarized here) are  
  
[www.scholarshipscanada.com/](http://www.scholarshipscanada.com/)  
[http://www.moolahspot.com/answers/index.cfm?adv\\_id=top10\\_scholarship\\_do\\_dont\\_1](http://www.moolahspot.com/answers/index.cfm?adv_id=top10_scholarship_do_dont_1)
- 4. Be mindful of your audience.** Keep in mind who will review your application. Most of the time, this is a committee that does not include any mathematicians. Perhaps not even scientists or engineers. Write your application accordingly. This goes specifically for your research description. Minimize the use of mathematical and technical terms, and avoid formulas. Don't use jargon.
- 5. Motivation/Significance and Objectives.** These things are arguably the most important ingredients in your research description, far more important than technical details. You need to convince your reader why he or she should care. Why is your proposed research interesting? What is its significance? How does it fit into the "big picture" of the discipline? In terms of objective, rather than being vague, state clear expected outcomes (studying something is not an objective or outcome). Then make it clear what your contribution will be and how it augments existing results.

6. **Organization.** Oftentimes, instructions for writing a research description ask you to address specific items, such as motivation, significance, methodology, etc. Follow these guidelines. Keep each of these items clearly separated and encapsulated, rather than mixing them up all through your proposal. Depending on the permitted length of the research proposal, devote one or several paragraphs to each item. Begin each of these paragraphs or sections with the appropriate header, or start each with the appropriate phrase (“The objective of the proposed research is...”. “This research is significant because ...”, “The proposed methodology is...” etc).
7. **Evaluation Criteria.** Pay attention to the evaluation criteria for the award you are applying for and target your application accordingly. You need to convince the reviewers that you meet or even excel in each criterion. Most scholarships ask for the obvious: academic excellence. They generally also ask for research potential or ability, so be sure to include anything to support this (e.g. prior research experience, research awards) and write your research description in such a way that the reader is convinced that you are qualified to undertake the proposed research. Other criteria are less common, such as evidence of leadership or dissemination of mathematics to non-experts. Again, be sure to address them.
8. **Proof-read.** Again, this sounds obvious, but you’d be surprised how many applicants don’t do it. A sloppy application is the kiss of death, and bad English (and even spelling errors) annoy your supervisor and the reviewers, which is the last thing you want to do. Carefully craft, edit and proof-read the entire application — especially the free- form or essay parts — and read it over multiple times.
9. **Get help and feedback.** Once you have proof-read your application, ask a fellow student to look it over (and return the favour if possible). Always get your supervisor to help with your application and review it. If offered, always submit your application to the Graduate Committee for review after your supervisor has vetted it. Follow your supervisor’s and the Graduate Committee’s advice; they have lots of experience.
10. **Deadlines.** Deadlines are almost always hard and late applications are not accepted. Start your application early. Finish it well before the official deadline in order to allow enough time for a fellow student, your supervisor and the Graduate Committee to review your application and for you to incorporate their feedback.

**\*\*\* Good Luck! \*\*\***