

# First Impressions: Titles, summaries, and opening paragraphs

A positive first impression is an asset within the highly competitive SSHRC research funding environment. A reviewer's first impression comes from a number of parts of your application, namely your title, summary, and opening paragraph.

## TITLES

Your title is your first point of contact with your reviewer and is probably the most read piece of your application. Effective titles help the reviewer understand specifically what is to come.

A good title:

- Summarizes the main idea simply,
- Grabs your reviewer's attention early,
- Is fully explanatory when standing alone,
- Contains no more than 10 to 15 words, and
- Can easily be shortened to a running header.

**CONSIDER USING A SHORT TITLE WITH AN EXPLANATORY SUBTITLE—e.g.,**  
*Landing the big grant: Critical factors for SSHRC success*

Additionally, in your title, avoid:

- Words/phrases that have no purpose (e.g., “a study of” or “an experimental investigation of”),
- Obscure quotations,
- Jargon, and
- Abbreviations or acronyms that are not well known.

## SUMMARIES

While your title might be the most read part of your application, your summary is arguably the most important part of your application for the following reasons:

1. It is your sales pitch, your first opportunity to create buy-in and support for your research.
2. Only two reviewers on the adjudication committee will be required to read your application in its entirety; the other members will rely on your summary to give them a clear accurate picture of your project.
3. Even though the two reviewers will read your entire application, they will have read many applications and may use your summary to refresh their memories of your proposed research project.

A good summary is a succinct overview of your proposed research project written in clear, plain language, using non-technical terms and containing the following elements:

- The context,
- The problem and its significance,
- Your research goal or question,,
- Your main objectives,
- Your overall approach,
- The expected contributions to knowledge, and
- The expected benefits to society.

## O PENING PARAGRAPHS

A positive first impression of your detailed description is important. Reviewers will often make a decision within the first couple of paragraphs whether your research is significant not.

Convince reviewers early of the importance and necessity of your research and have them on your side from the very beginning. The rest of your application is further information for, and evidence of why, the research is so important and why you are the one to undertake it.

Your opening paragraph(s) must grab and engage the reviewer. It needs to:

1. Contain succinct problem statement that sets the stage for your research
2. Convey a sense of urgency by laying out the problem at hand and answering the “so what?” question,
3. Present clearly articulated research purpose,
4. Present well-defined and formulated research objectives (or questions), and
5. Provide strong argument for why you are the best researcher to undertake the project.

### TIPS for SUCCESS

- ✓ Write from a reviewer’s perspective.
- ✓ Write with confidence and enthusiasm.
- ✓ Write using active voice.
- ✓ Convey the need for your research.
- ✓ Use clear, accessible language.

**NOTE:** For more suggestions on how to write effective opening paragraphs, consult the complementary SSHRC Tip Series sheet titled “Problem statement, purpose, and objectives”.

## S OURCES AND SUGGESTED RESOURCES

American Psychological Association. 2010. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6<sup>th</sup> edition)*. Washington, DC: Author.

Booth WC, Colomb GG, Williams JM. 2008. *The Craft of Research (3<sup>rd</sup> edition)*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Walters MW. 2009. *Write an Effective Funding Application: A Guide for Researchers & Scholars*. Baltimore, ML: The Johns Hopkins University Press.