TIPS TO WRITING THE OUTLINE OF PROPOSED RESEARCH

The Outline of Proposed Research (OPR) is one of the most important components of your NSERC application. This section is where you provide evidence that you have the potential to be a good researcher with excellent written communication skills. These tips are provided in place of a template so as not to affect personal style and jeopardize the purpose of the OPR.

If you have not yet decided on a specific project, you must still provide a detailed description of a research project that interests you. You are not bound by this project. You may change your research direction or activities during the course of the award with permission of the Associate Vice-President, Research.

Preparation

- Do the ground work by completing a literature review. Plan to refer to at least four.
- Give yourself plenty of time to think, write and re-write.
- Forward your OPR to your referees who are writing your Appendix 1 – Report on the Applicant and request their feedback on the content.
- If you submit your OPR before October 13th the Office of Research can provide feedback on style.
- Remember, NSERC is looking for evidence of your ability to create new knowledge through your research and your potential to disseminate it.

Presentation

- Follow formatting guidelines (see NSERC Form 200 instructions)
  - Insert your name in the top right margin
- Optimize readability – headings, paragraphing, sentence length, white space
- Use the space allotted (e.g. one page includes citations)
- Carefully edit for fact, grammar, spelling, redundancy, clarity

Writing Style

- Follow the basic Rules of Writing (below)
- Apply the KISS (Keep It Simple Sam!) principle – avoid “academese” and disciplinary jargon; define terms and concepts
- Use active sentence construction
- Convey your ideas with confidence
- Be concise AND explain

Key Proposal Content

1. Research question
2. Goal(s) and Objectives
3. Context/Literature Review
4. Methodology
5. Significance of Proposed Research

Goal(s) and Objectives
A goal statement indicates what the proposal seeks to achieve in a broader sense. Consider the impact at level of:
- Individual, organization, community, national, international level
- Environment, social, cultural, economic, political
- Scholarly/intellectual
Objectives are specific and concrete – what are you going to do in the timeframe of the research.
- Can be articulated in the form of research questions
- Lead directly to outcomes that support the overall goal
- Need to be consistent throughout the proposal
- Need to be doable/realistic

Context
Three elements:
1. Rational – significance
2. Lit review – situate where your research fits in the field
3. Theoretical approach(es)/framework that you will use

Literature Review
Identify the niche for the proposed project – how does it fit into previous scholarship?
Make sure your lit review is thorough, includes recent citations, peer-reviewed journals.

Methodology
State the objectives and outline the experimental or theoretical approach to be taken (citing literature pertinent to the proposal), and the methods and procedures to be used.

Significance of Proposed Research
This is where you grab the reviewers’ attention and get them excited and interested.
- Address the “so what?” question: why is this important/original/significant/relevant?
  - Will it create new knowledge or advance knowledge in some manner?
  - What identified problem(s) will be addressed?
  - What impact will it have?
  - Who will benefit?
  - Who is interested in this research?
  - What gap does it fill in this field of research?
- Indicate the overall proposal goal(s), objectives, key outcomes, innovations, benefits
Rules of Writing

1. Verbs HAS to agree with their subjects.
2. Prepositions are not words to end sentences with.
3. And don’t start a sentence with a conjunction.
4. It is wrong to ever split an infinitive.
5. Avoid clichés like the plague (they’re old hat).
6. Comparisons are as bad as clichés.
7. Also, always avoid annoying alliteration.
8. Be more or less specific.
9. Parenthetical remarks (however relevant) are (usually) unnecessary.
10. Also too, never, ever use repetitive redundancies.
11. No sentence fragments.
12. Contractions aren’t necessary and shouldn’t be used.
13. Foreign words and phrases are not apropos.
14. Do not be redundant; do not use more words than necessary; it’s highly superfluous.
15. One should NEVER generalize.
16. Don’t use no double negatives.
17. Eschew ampersands & abbreviations, etc.
19. Analogies in writing are like feathers on a snake.
20. The passive voice is to be ignored.
21. Eliminate commas, that are, not necessary. Parenthetical words however should be enclosed in commas.
22. Never use a big word when a diminutive one would suffice.
23. Kill all exclamation points!!
24. Use words correctly, irregardless of how others use them.
25. Understatement is always the absolute best way to put forth earth shaking ideas.
26. Use the apostrophe in it’s proper place and omit it when its not needed.
27. Eliminate quotations. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “I hate quotations. Tell me what you know.”
28. If you’ve hear it once, you’ve heard it a thousand times: Resist hyperbole, not one writer in a million can use it correctly.
29. Puns are for children, not groan readers.
30. Go around the barn at high noon to avoid colloquialisms.
31. Even IF a mixed metaphor sings, it should be derailed.
32. Who needs rhetorical questions?
33. Exaggeration is a billion times worse than understatement.
34. Proofread carefully to see if you any words out.