

this research to contribute to debates on X and play an important role in shaping research on X and Y in the coming years.”

My scholarship reveals black women's previously hidden intellectual production, making their theoretical contributions more accessible. In the process, it reveals black women activists as key figures in the development and direction of black power activism, ultimately contributing to debates about the public memory of African American liberation movements.

This conclusion pulls together the disparate elements of the application and returns the reader to the urgency of the subject.

Do all of this, my friend, and you will walk away with abundant funding for every project. You will have the leisure to do the best work, and the best work will, in turn, legitimize you for the next major grant for which you apply. You will be on the grant gravy train, and that is the key to the most successful academic careers. As you gain these successes, be sure to pass on your own grant proposals as models to those coming after you. Stay alert to this kind of capital when it crosses your path, and always be ready to pass it on. It's good karma.

## FIFTY-TWO

### Proving Your Project Is Worthy

While the Foolproof Grant Template is highly formulaic, that doesn't mean it is easy to apply in practice. There are two places where grant writers working with the template routinely fall down: The first is in the first “large topic” sentence. And the second is in the articulation of the “gap” that occurs in the However Sentence.

In the Foolproof Grant Template, I ask for an opening sentence or two that quickly engages the reader in the topic of the research. This is more difficult than it seems. Young academics have been so disciplined to think in terms of analysis and citation that they cannot easily step back to remember that there is a phenomenon that precedes scholarly argumentation about the phenomenon. This phenomenon exists or existed in the world at large—the world in which people live, as opposed to the world that is inside your or your advisor's mind.

You will note that the Foolproof Grant Template does not open with the tedious line, “My/this research/dissertation is about . . .” That is because this is one of the most self-absorbed openings possible, and it displays indifference to the wants and needs of readers. Consider these four opening sentences:

“My dissertation is about declining polar bear populations.”

“I am applying to the X Fellowship to support my dissertation, which is on declining polar bear populations.”

"Many scientists in the field of environmental studies have been debating the causes of polar bear population decline."

"Polar bear populations are plummeting due to recent changes in the climate."

Only the last actually rises up to articulate the phenomenon that precedes any studies, arguments, or analyses, and inspires the reader to take notice.

It is true that to continue in this vein would be to move into a kind of journalistic sensationalism, but as you are a scholar, that is easily avoided. In sentence 2 and 3 of the template, you situate the phenomenon within a scholarly dialogue, and then demonstrate the existence of a scholarly gap. Grant writing is, let it not be forgotten, PR. You are selling a project, and the reader needs to buy it.

You do that by remembering that we live in a world of big issues. This is true even when your work is on a relatively obscure topic—for example, fourteenth-century Japanese Buddhist iconography, or, say, compositional structure in early modern opera—as long as it is one meaningful in your particular field. "Big" is a relative term, and while the truly big issues of our times—immigration, global climate change, and the like—garner the largest grants, any academic subject can be shown to speak to important disciplinary questions.

Once you have established your topic and the bodies of literature that relate to it, the next problem arises at the point where you identify a gap, in order to legitimize your specific research topic. The difficulty here is that just because something has never been studied before does not in and of itself mean that it should be. And just because you chose to spend a decade of your life on a subject does not in and of itself mean that we, as readers, find the subject worthy of interest or financial support.

Many new grant writers are confused on these two points, and fondly and naïvely believe that because they found a gap, and because they spent a decade trying to fill that gap, the importance of the gap will be immediately compelling to funders. It is not.

In short, too many grant writers imagine that the gap is the exact micro-topic of their dissertation.

I once had a colleague who used to mock the annoying academics who bring every discussion back to their own interests. "Why did that job talk [on, for example, postwar American ethnic literature] not discuss elephants?" she'd slyly ask. In other words, why aren't you discussing the thing *I'm* interested in?

This is the problem of the Foolproof Grant Template gap, except that here it is the grant writer who has taken on the role of the self-absorbed academic: "Why has the field failed to address elephants, i.e., my particularly scholarly preoccupations? Outrageous, I say!"

This is the reason that so many grant applications devolve into sour complaints about those "other" scholars who have "badly neglected" or "incomprehensibly overlooked" or "shockingly failed to address" this microscopically small topic. Remember: Just because people have not yet discussed topic X does not in and of itself persuade us, the readers, that topic X is worthy of being discussed.

Readers are under no obligation to consider your micro-topic of any inherent interest or urgency, until you actually use your words to demonstrate that it is. That does not mean adding five new sentences to construct a fatiguingly wordy rationale. It means using one sentence effectively to shake the reader into awareness that the literature, while excellent, has overlooked a point that upon further reflection is of great significance.

Let's take a dissertation on emergent racial minority activism in Japan. Here is a self-absorbed gap sentence:

Stunningly, scholars to date have failed completely to adequately address the imagery of historical and geographical identity used in websites created by groups such as the Buraku Liberation League.

Here is an effective gap sentence:

Scholars to date have not attended to the increasing mobilization of social media and Internet technology in minority activism in Japan; these new technologies, however, have transformed activism by providing new anonymous sites for members to safely debate racial identity and plan real-world mobilizations.

.....

The first example reads like a passive-aggressive indictment of other scholars for their failure to study *your* project. The second example educates the reader in an emergent phenomenon, and catalyzes curiosity about what the phenomenon really means. That curiosity is what keeps committees reading, and grant money flowing.

It is a perennial danger for dissertation writers to be obsessed by their narrow dissertation topics. To write an effective grant application, however, you need to step back, and be able to tell a wider story of why your topic is necessary and timely for an understanding of your subject writ large.

## FIFTY-THREE

.....

### The Postdoc Application: How It's Different and Why

Postdoctoral fellowships in the humanities and social sciences have emerged in the past twenty years or so as a kind of stop-gap alternative to elusive first tenure track jobs. Sponsored by universities or foundations, they support research and writing work for scholars within a few years of their Ph.D.'s. Prominent examples include the Princeton Society of Fellows, the Harvard Society of Fellows, the Michigan Society of Fellows, and the Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship of Scholars, which places scholars at R1 institutions and elite liberal arts colleges around the country.

These postdocs are usually between one and three years in length, and they're typically organized around a theme that changes with each annual round of review. To take one example, the Princeton Society of Fellows science competition for 2015–18 will award four fellowships. Two of these are open to any area of the humanities or social sciences, one is focused on the study of "race and/or ethnicity," and one is reserved for what they are calling "humanistic studies."

These postdoctoral fellowships are distinct from science postdocs, which are arranged individually, last for an indefinite number of years, and constitute a required phase of training for the academic science career. The humanities and social science postdoc is