

Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies

Applying for NSERC graduate & postgraduate scholarships

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<https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/funding>

Points to cover

- Background : the scholarships, deadlines
- Application process : common elements to Master's and Doctoral applicants
- Selection criteria
- Writing a research proposal : what to do, what not to do.
- My experience with NSERC scholarships.

Terminology:

- CGS = Canada Graduate Scholarships
- PGS = Post-Graduate Scholarship
- Suffix M : Master's
- Suffix D : Doctoral

CGS M

- \$17,500 for 12 months.
- Tenable only at Canadian institutions.

PGS D

- \$21,000 for 3 years
- Tenable at Canadian institutions *or* abroad, provided you have received a degree from a Canadian institution.

- \$35,000 for 3 years
- Tenable only at Canadian institutions
- A single application for both CGS/PGS D. Top-ranked applicants are offered CGS, highly-ranked applicants in next tier are offered PGS.

Deadlines

- Vary by award and academic unit.
- Typically October – November; ask early (now) to avoid missing out!
- Start early!

Application process

Links to (most) relevant funding opportunities:

<https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/funding/opportunities>

Common elements to CGS M (Masters) & PGS/CGS D (Doctoral):

- Curriculum vitae (CV)
- Transcripts
- Research proposal (abstract and detailed summary)
- Reports on the applicant (referees)

Doctoral specific:

- Contributions to research and development

Application process

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Common elements to CGS M (Masters) & PGS/CGS D (Doctoral):

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Selection criteria (CGS M, Masters)

50% Academic excellence

- Academic record. Scholarships and awards held. Program specific metrics.

30% Research potential

- Quality and merit of research proposal. Related work experience. Relative experience and achievements. Quality of previous research contributions.

20% Personal characteristics and interpersonal skills

- Work and leadership experience. Project management. Academic involvement and service. Volunteerism.

Selection criteria (PGS/CGS D, Doctoral)

50% Research potential

- Quality of research proposal. Relevant training. Relative experience and achievements. Quality of research contributions. Communication skills.

50% Relevant experience and achievements obtained within and beyond academia

- Scholarships & awards. Academic record. Professional, academic and extracurricular activities.

The *Selection Committee Guide (Doctoral and Postdoctoral)*

https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/doc/Students-Etudiants/SelectionCommitteeGuide_e.pdf

- Guide is specific to NSERC PGS/CGS D (doctoral)
- Rough guide: how NSERC scholarship applications are evaluated
- Relevant information: keyword *scholarship*

Writing a research proposal

Outline of proposed research (attachment – two pages maximum)

In the *Outline of proposed research* page of your application, provide the requested information according to the guidelines and format standards outlined in the [NSERC online presentation and attachment standards](#).

You must complete this section independently.

Provide a detailed yet concise description of your proposed research project for the period during which you are to hold the award. Be as specific as possible. Provide background information to position your proposed research within the context of the current knowledge in the field. State the significance of the proposed research to a field or fields in NSE. State the objectives and hypothesis, and outline the experimental or theoretical approach to be taken (citing literature pertinent to the proposal) and the methods and procedures to be used.

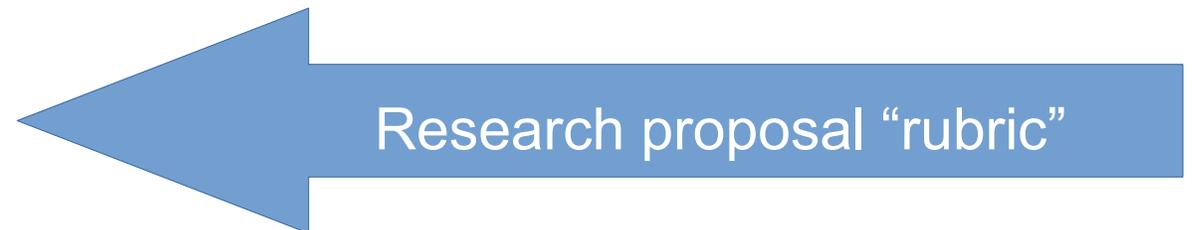
Research ability and potential

Quality of research proposal

- specific, focused, and feasible research question(s) and objective(s)
- clear description of the proposed methodology
- significance and expected contributions to research

In addition:

- Your research must be part of an overall research program in a field supported by NSERC.
- You should not repeat the information found in the *Theses completed or in progress* section, but you may refer to it.
- Include all relevant information in the outline. Do not refer members to URLs or other publications for supplemental information. Such additional information will not be reviewed by members.
- If the proposed research is a continuation of your thesis, clearly state the differences between work done for your thesis and the research activities outlined in this proposal.
- Write your proposal in clear, plain language, and avoid jargon. Your application will be reviewed by a selection committee covering a broad discipline category.
- NSERC expects you to write your research proposal independently and to properly reference ideas or text belonging to others.
- **PDF only:** You should include your references within the two-page *Outline of proposed research* section.



When writing a research proposal:

Do:

- Assume that whoever is reading your proposal is technically literate but *not* familiar with your subject area.
- Clearly state your research questions / objectives / hypothesis.
- Clearly state the methodology of your proposed research.
- Mention any noteworthy progress you have already made (unless it was part of a previous thesis).
- Emphasize any applications your research would have beyond your niche subject area.
- Set realistic objectives. List individual milestones you intend to accomplish.
- Have several colleagues (students and professors) critique your research proposal.

Do not:

- Include spelling or grammatical errors.
- Use the passive voice by accident.
- Use technical jargon unless *absolutely necessary*. If you must include it, define it in plain language.
- Include grossly unnecessary details. This is an example of “padding your proposal”, and should be avoided. Examples include:
 - detailed historical context of the research problem,
 - exhaustive list of existing theories and why they do not address your research problem.
- Be afraid to “sell” your research.

My experience

Attempt #1: Applying for PGS/CGS D near the end of my Masters, for PhD starting the subsequent fall. Rejected.

In retrospect:

- My research topic was interesting to people in my field, but difficult to explain to outsiders. Its applications were limited.
- My grades from early undergrad weren't great.
- I had one paper published and one under review, which is good but not great.
- I had no prior scholarships and only some non-competitive awards.

My experience

Attempt #2: Applying during the first year of my PhD. Rejected again.

In retrospect:

- My research topic was still too esoteric.
- My Master's / Doctoral grades were exceptional, but still weighted by weaker undergrad grades.
- I had two papers published and two under review, which was definitely an improvement but not quite enough to tip the scales.
- I held one internal competitive scholarship at the time of application.

My experience

Attempt #3: Applying during the second year of my PhD. Awarded NSERC CGS D.

What was different this time:

- My research proposal was more mature, less esoteric, more explicit.
- I heavily emphasized related applications to sciences and engineering in my proposal.
- I had projects ongoing that had already demonstrated success in answering some of my research questions.
- I had five papers published and two others under review at the time.
- I asked not only my advisor, but other students that had successfully secured NSERC scholarships to read and critique my proposal.
- I attended extra teaching workshops and volunteered my time in various ways to improve student experiences in grad school.

What was still the same:

- My weak undergraduate grades.

Graduate Funding

Graduate Funding Team



External team:

Ester Di Cori, Fellowships Officer

Jan Walker, Fellowships Administrator

Phoebe Zamanuel, Student Affairs Coordinator

Internal funding team:

Lilia Eskildsen Torres, Fellowships Officer

Hannah(Shuhua) Hu, Adm. & Student Affairs Coord.

Quinter Faith, Student Affairs Coordinator

graduatefunding.gps@mcgill.ca

Remember: Include your McGill ID NUMBER

Resources

- **Workshops and Webinars**

- Offer support in all aspects of the external funding application process and help maximize your chances
- <https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/funding/maximize-my-chances>

- **SKILLSETS**

- Suite of workshops designed for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows to complement research training
- <https://www.mcgill.ca/skillsets>

- **Tips for writing a research proposal**

- <https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/students/research-tracking/proposals>