Grants: what they are and how to get them

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But what a grant *really* means: $$$
Four kinds of (professional) academic writing

1. Articles for publication (research, book review, squibs, etc.)

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Why are grants important?

- Having a good publication record and conference presentations are necessary **but not sufficient** for your job prospects.
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  - An original hypothesis that you can test
  - New data added to the record
  - Experiments you can conduct
  - Testing the predictions of an existing theory
  - etc.
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  - etc.
- Yes, you can publish these things, but where does your research come from?
Why grants are the best part of the ‘profession’

You can dream

You can ‘buy’ your freedom and independence

You can validate your ideas

You can create new knowledge

Less stressful than publishing articles or presenting at conferences
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Relative competitiveness

- Articles for publication: <15%
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- Conferences: <15%

Therefore: getting a grant is as difficult as getting into a top conference or published in a top journal.

But! Grants also carry the same ‘weight’ on your CV...

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  - → *award* or *reject* (sometimes with criticism)
  - → fix it, rewrite it, resubmit it, repeat as necessary
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★ Therefore: generally, grants involve a better stress-to-payoff ratio...
A slogan: “Grants get grants”

- Scaffolding: why you should start **now**
  - Pre-doctoral bits and pieces
  - Doctoral fellowship (*Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada*)
  - Postdoctoral fellowship (Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research)
  - *Marie Curie Fellowship* (post-doc and professors)
  - Fieldwork: School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London); US Department of State (USAID); CNPq (Brazil)
  - Research: National Science Foundation; Marsden (NZ)

★ **Take away:** start small, go big
Why is a linguist doing this?

Because it doesn’t matter for three reasons:

1. Grants in the humanities and social sciences all follow a common structure with similar narrative and rhetorical styles
2. You will likely not find someone who does exactly what you do anyway, and who will help you write a grant proposal (assuming they’ve done this successfully before)
3. There is a good possibility I will be adjudicating your proposal...
Three steps

1. A grant *always* starts with an idea
2. We then develop this idea into a project
3. We then develop a project into a grant proposal

A *proposal* is the actual document your produce to submit for a grant, fellowship, scholarship, etc.
Idea(s): where do they come from?

- The easiest and most difficult part – at the same time...
- It can come from anywhere: a hunch, an observation, something you read, something someone says, etc.
- Ideas often come from encountering and trying to solve a problem, or wanting to ‘fill a gap’ in our knowledge
- For me the most difficult part: making a decision and committing to it
- **Strategy #1:** talk with your peers, mentors and supervisors
- **Strategy #2:** research!
- Both are necessary
The Idea(s): Big picture reasoning

- You must start organizing your thinking at some point
- Two kinds of argumentation commonly used in the social sciences to give an idea a logical structure
  - Deductive reasoning uses established (or commonly accepted) facts, definitions, theories etc. to make predictions that can be tested
  - Inductive reasoning uses ‘new’ data from observations or experiments that lead to generalizations that are then explained by (a) theory
- The person adjudicating your project may not always be aware of this underlying structure – but they might...
Deductive and inductive reasoning...

... are ‘mirror images’ of one another, but use only one kind!
**Inductive reasoning:** from a number of observations, a general conclusion is drawn.

**Observations**
- Members of a species are not all the same.
- Individuals compete for resources.
- Species are generally adapted to their environment.

**Conclusion**
Individuals most adapted to their environment are more likely to survive and pass their traits on to the next generation.

**Deductive reasoning:** from a general premise, specific results are predicted.

**General premise**
Individuals most adapted to their environment are more likely to survive and pass their traits on to the next generation.

**Predicted results**
If the average temperature in an ecosystem increases due to climate change, individuals better adapted to warmer temperatures will outcompete those that are not.
Heuristics

“A heuristic is any approach to problem solving, learning, or discovery that employs a practical method not guaranteed to be optimal or perfect, but sufficient for the immediate goals. Where finding an optimal solution is impossible or impractical, heuristic methods can be used to speed up the process of finding a satisfactory solution.”

(Thanks Wikipedia...)

- Using patterns of reasoning (deduction and induction) are useful heuristics that help you
  - organize your thinking,
  - give structure to your project, and
  - make you think about things you might not have thought about before
We are not ready to write a proposal yet...

...but we can start thinking about the major ‘pieces’ that eventually go into the proposal

This is the **project** stage

Why the project stage is important:

- You can’t write consistently or coherently about ideas that are not well-formed/researched/discussed/vetted yet
- Modularization: different parts of the project can be modified without having to change everything about your idea(s)
- The parts of the project make you think about other things you haven’t considered yet
Ideas → Project: some major concepts

- Commonly misunderstood and/or misused and/or equivocated terminology in the social sciences:
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- **Hypothesis:**
  A proposed explanation for a set of facts or observations that can be tested
A (scary) hypothesis

“\textit{I’ve narrowed it to two hypotheses: it grew or we shrunk.}”
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  - **Explanation:**
    What a theory does in practice – not to be confused with a *description* of some set of facts or observations
  - **Analysis:**
    The detailed examination of some set of facts or observations and the relationships that hold between them
Don’t rush
Develop a worksheet and checklist
Find a successful model and reverse engineer it