

# Defining and developing techniques specific to “fellowship writing”



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## QUICK FACTS ABOUT OSAKA UNIVERSITY



A National university

3,113 staff **QS Ranking:**

3,541 faculty members **67**

15,250 undergraduate students

8,054 graduate students

## Introduction:

### The “Research Fellowship for Young Scientists” program

- A **funding scheme** of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), aiming to financially support **doctoral and post-doctoral students** from all disciplines
- It provides to its fellows not only **monthly remuneration** but **grants for them to carry out the proposed research projects** during a 2-3 years time span.
- Max. funding per person is around **7,800,000 to 17,532,000 JPY**
- Call for proposals opens once a year.
- Average acceptance rate is about 20%.
- About 2,200 new fellow appointments every year

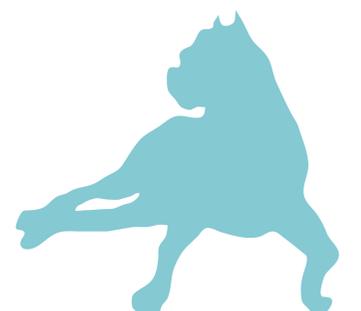
### Support at Osaka University for young researchers to apply for the Research Fellowship

To help doctoral students with their **career development**, as well as to help them obtain **research funding**, **research administrators (RAs)** from the **Office of Management and Planning, Osaka University** have been offering the following support for the past 5 years:

- 1** Information sessions in Japanese and in English
- 2** An Application Manual (Japanese ver. and English ver.), which covers not only an introduction to the system, but also proposal writing techniques, resources available, and application procedures, etc.
- 3** Writing workshops
- 4** Simulated interviews
- 5** **Writing consultation:** RAs review proposals and give improvement advice

## Purpose:

By reflecting on frequent mistakes we found from the 82 proposals we worked on this year, we aim to show that “fellowship writing” is different from ordinary grant writing in a number of ways and therefore requires different coaching techniques for RAs when advising applicants.



# Frequent mistakes found in “fellowship writing”

Taking a close look at the 82 proposals we worked on this year, a number of frequent mistakes applicants made, which are mostly caused by the lack of understanding in characteristics specific to fellowship writing, can be identified.

## Failure to write a detailed description of the applicant's master's project

While grant writing for ordinary research funding may require a summary of past projects related to the proposed one, this fellowship puts weight on a detailed explanation of the applicant's master's project. The reason is that how the applicant as a doctoral student designed and carried out their master's project can help reviewers evaluate their **potential as a young researcher**. Out of the 82 proposals, 35 are missing at least 1 necessary element such as methodology.

**Hint for RAs:** to help applicants understand the structure and its necessary elements of a well-organized past project description

## Failure to write a concrete and feasible future research plan

Different from independent researchers, doctoral students do their research under professors' supervision. This fellowship considers it important that **the applicant is able to carry out the research independently**, instead of passively following instructions. Out of the 82 applicants, 30 failed to write their roles in the project by, e.g., emphasizing roles of their supervisors, or how they would follow supervisors' instructions, instead of providing a concrete research plan as a leading researcher of this project.

**Hint for RAs:** to help applicants think about their roles in the project that balance their independence and professors' supervision; identify necessary elements of a step-by-step and feasible plan

## Failure to make an appropriate self-evaluation

While in grant writing referees evaluate both the quality of the proposed project and the applicant's capability of implementing the research plan, applicants of this fellowship are too young to have enough research achievements for referees to assess their capability. Therefore, a self-evaluation is required. Applicants tend to make cliché statements, which makes many of the **self-evaluations** very similar. E.g., out of the 82 applicants, 26 claim to be good at English.

**Hint for RAs:** to make a set of indicators that can help applicants find out their own good qualities and write in an appropriate and appealing way

## Failure to show the meaning and potential impact of the proposed research project

Funding is provided to fellows during their doctoral years, which causes ambiguity among applicants when write about what can be expected from their proposed research. Out of the 82 applicants, 14 make finishing their Ph.D. degree the final goal; 17 claim their research will be “the first in the world” without sound proof, instead of properly stating the **originality and potential impact** of the project.

**Hint for RAs:** to help applicants understand the purpose of the fellowship; identify different pathways to research impact

As experienced as pre-award RAs are in helping researchers with grant writing, fellowship writing may require special attention, especially when it is a fellowship for inexperienced young researchers. We suggest that when advise young researchers on fellowship writing, the following efforts, among others, may worth trying:

- To identify **necessary elements of a well-organized description for a past research project**, which is usually not required in ordinary grant writing
- To identify **necessary elements of a step-by-step and feasible research plan for the proposed project**, in which the applicant's role is clear, independent enough but realistic as a doctoral student
- To make a set of **indicators for appropriate self-evaluation**
- To identify **different pathways to research impact** that fits the scale of doctoral studies, which might be smaller than ordinary sponsored research projects

## Conclusions:

