**SEVEN KEY QUESTIONS: Before You Write**

Whether you are writing a paper for publication, a thesis, a proposal, a grant application, or even an abstract to submit to a conference, you must first organize your thinking. Before you write the document, first write the answers to the Seven Key Questions listed below and then discuss them with a colleague. You will save time and energy; the end product will be more complete and persuasive. Note: Answers may overlap. Contribution may signal importance or possible applications, for example.

1. **FOCUS/ PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED**

What is the specific problem or issue that you identified as work that needed to be done? In other words, what is the specific **Focus** of your research? In other words, what challenge motivated your selection of this project?

1. **IMPORTANCE**

How is your work important? Why should other engineers/researchers care about your incremental contribution? Why should the general public care about your contribution?

1. **METHOD(s)**

What method(s) did you choose to address the problem? Other methods were probably possible. Identify other possibilities and defend your choice(s). (The answer is NOT that this method is the one your advisor told you to use.)

1. **CONTEXT (Related work)**

How does your work fit into other research that has been done in your field? How does it link with closely related research? How does it fit into the wider field? In other words, what previous work do you build on, extend, generalize, test, challenge, validate, improve, or apply in new ways? What other reported research validates your choice of research focus? What are the key issues on which other researchers agree or disagree? Where do you stand on the issues?

1. **RESULTS**

What, specifically, are your findings to date? What other results do you reasonably expect? What evidence will you need to convince other engineers of those results?

1. **UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION**

What, specifically, are you reporting that is NEW? Your contribution(s) must be clearly identified and carefully differentiated from those of other researchers.

1. **POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS**

In what ways might your work be useful, either theoretically or practically? What future research might grow out of your research?

Janice L. Hewitt, Ph.D. Rice University, 2014 jhewitt@rice.edu