

WRITING YOUR FELLOWSHIP APPLICATION

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SELF-REFLECTION

Self-reflection is the capacity of humans to exercise introspection and the willingness to learn more about their fundamental nature, purpose, and essence.

-- Wikipedia

A sampling of self-reflection questions:

- What fires me up, gets me excited, and/or ignites my passion?
- What life experience has shaped who I am today?
- What are my most strongly held values?
- What am I doing today that will help me achieve a goal tomorrow?

RESEARCH & REFLECTION TO PREPARE AN APPLICATION

To discover and evaluate a fit for a fellowship, scholarship, or grant you must first understand the purpose of the foundation and award, which will take some research and specific reflection.

-- Ann Landstrom

Specific fellowship, scholarship, or grant questions:

- Who is the foundation that will be reviewing the application?
- What are the characteristics of a successful candidate?
- Why are you applying? Why are you interested in receiving this award? What is the value for you and potentially others?
- What are the goals/objectives of your project or professional education? What do you hope to do with this award?
- What qualities do you have that match this fellowship award? Coursework, major, experiences, interests, accomplishments, personality traits, unique aspects?

THE WRITING PROCESS

There is no great writing, only great re-writing.
-- Justice Louis Brandeis



Defined:

- ✓ Brainstorming and Pre-Writing:

 - ✓ Outlining:

 - ✓ Drafting:

 - ✓ Revising:

 - ✓ Editing:
- There is not one right way to progress through the writing process, as you may start at the brainstorming & pre-writing and move to drafting; you may move frequently between drafting and revising; you may jump from drafting to editing, and then editing back to revising; and you may even go from revising back to brainstorming & pre-writing. Know that all of these stages are available to you in whatever way you need them.

 - Multiple reiterations of your statements are expected. As an example you may be in the drafting and revising stage for quite a while as you consider how to clarify, make stronger connections, show/demonstrate rather than just tell, organize more logically, develop your argument, etc.

 - A quality fellowship application may take up to 5-10 drafts/revisions, or more.

For additional information on these stages, visit <https://www.grinnell.edu/academics/centers-programs-and-resources/reading-writing-speaking>, to read ***The Grinnell College Guide to Writing, Research, and Speaking***.

THE FELLOWSHIP WRITING PROMPT

The fellowship application is meant to be a seamless document from the listing of your activities, writing of the proposal and personal statement, to the # of characters/words/pages of an essay. The application shares your story and how it relates to the study, research, teaching, project, or educational experience you want to pursue.

-- Ann Landstrom

First and foremost you should always follow the 'prompt(s)' of the fellowship, scholarship, or grant.

Prompts are based upon the written requirements:

- **Project Proposals** – specific document outlining the proposed study, research, teaching, project or experience that you plan to pursue.
- **Personal Statements** – document that provides professional and personal information that relates to your project proposal.
- **Personal Statements with Study Program** – document that outlines your study interest along with professional and personal information that relates to the study you want to pursue.
- **Topical Essays** – document that requires you to respond to specific topics such as a 'thought provoking question' or 'review of another document.'
- **Short-answer Essays** – responses to questions on the application that are targeted and specific.

THE RHETORICAL CONTEXT

It is important to consider the rhetorical context (rhetorical situation). This is what drives our writing and how we construct our messages in the most impactful way.

-- Erin Today

These three elements influence each other and ultimately determine the message, and how the message is delivered. How are these relevant to YOU and the award to which you are applying?

- **Purpose** – Why am I writing? So what?
- **Audience** – Who is reading this? What are their expectations? What is their knowledge? What are their interests?
- **Author** – Who are you? What do you have to offer?

AN EXERCISE IN ARGUMENT

*A good first step in writing a personal statement is to think of it not merely as a descriptive piece of writing, but as an **argument**.*

-- Erin Todey

This may sound strange, since you certainly don't want to sound combative or belligerent in any way. Still, a personal statement is "argumentative" in the sense that you are trying to convince an audience to adopt a certain belief.

In the case of your personal statement, that belief is that *you are an applicant who, for various and special reasons, will be a good addition to your readers' specific institution, organization, or group of award recipients.*

In a sense, then, the first difficult step of writing has been accomplished before you even begin: you know your "thesis," even if this "thesis" remains unspoken. The task is to support this tacit, underlying, and powerful main idea.

How do you begin? First, bear in mind that successful arguers know how to make skilled use of three different kinds of appeals: **logos**, **pathos**, and **ethos**.

- **Logos** is the appeal to fact, logic, and rational belief.
 - "I am well-prepared for such study, as I have worked with Professor Smith for the past two years studying *Aspergillus flavus*, a pathogen affecting grain corn."
- **Pathos** is the appeal to emotion, feeling, and human sensitivity.
 - "The effect of *Aspergillus* on local crops was devastating for the farmers we met that summer. Some, in fact, had lost their entire year's profit."
- **Ethos** is the appeal from character.
 - "Although I was at first disheartened by the enormity of the problem, I knew that my knowledge of biology was invaluable, and I became more determined than ever to find answers for the local farming community."

In personal statements, **ethos** is often especially important. It establishes YOUR credibility, trust, and success. Ethos concerns your character and the personal qualities you have that are appropriate for the award. The writer in the above example of an appeal to ethos is subtly demonstrating that they are sensitive to the plight of others and, like most humans, feels vulnerable to a sense of defeat: "I was at first disheartened." They are also, however—and most importantly—someone who *rises to a challenge*, specifically by applying relevant and helpful skills and resources. What are your appeals for the fellowship(s) you are applying to?

Fellowship	Logos Appeal	Pathos Appeal	Ethos Appeal
*			
*			

IDEA GENERATION

Idea Generation, also termed as brainstorming & pre-writing, can be a frequently overlooked step in the writing process. Taking the time to plan and organize your thoughts will support better quality writing.
-- Erin Todey and Ann Landstrom

You can use one or more of these ideas to approach the essay prompt:

- **Conversations** – Talking to people about you and your project idea can generate a plethora of thoughts and comments from others, AND these exchanges can lead to contacts and affiliations too. When having these conversations have a notebook and pencil in hand to write these ideas, comments, and suggestions down vs relying on your memory.
- **Freewrite or Powerwrite** – Is thinking AS you write, NOT thinking and then writing. Letting your ideas come out on paper with no worry for the correctness or quality, or using the right grammar, spelling, or punctuation. It is unleashing your creativity without interference. For some this is the best method, yet do not anticipate perfection on the first draft!
- **Lists** – List your ideas and discover the relationships between them. And do not self-censor your lists, as an insignificant idea now may be a great idea later.
- **Journalist's Questions** – Especially helpful for Proposal Writing, responding to the Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How allows you to explore the topic and categorize details.
- **Central Thesis** – Do you have a central thesis draft? Yes. Use that in developing your ideas, taking key components to isolate and brainstorm ideas from. This will support your full writing and final crafting of your central thesis.
- **Mind mapping** – Place a topic in the center of the page and draw a circle around it. Then as you think of ideas, phrases, or related words write them and circle them AND connect them to one another. Many appreciate this non-linear approach, which is in the family of clustering and can also be termed webbing, bubbling, or diagramming.
- **Outline** – And for some, thinking linear is their best approach to writing an essay. And can be a very helpful step on its own, or you can transpose your conversations, lists, or mind map into an outline.

Are there other ways YOU approach writing essays?

WRITING STRATEGIES

Telling Your Story

Telling your story is ‘showing your ethos’. Sharing a concrete example of how you have conducted research, led an initiative, managed a responsibility, accomplished a goal, or worked through a tricky travel situation. A story helps the audience visualize you.

We recommend that you create a story using the following ‘Situation/Task, Action, Result’ (STAR) model for each of your key accomplishments, challenges, personal qualities; as well as the intangible or “soft” skills that fellowship foundations may seek, including teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, initiative, learning or time-management. Utilize these STAR stories to write and describe your experiences. This is also an exercise in preparing for and responding to interview questions.

- **SITUATION/TASK** – Describe vividly the experience, situation or challenge you were faced with. Start by putting it in a time frame – “My first week as a summer intern,” “During the last week of classes,” or “In the middle of the semester.” Then state the topic, problem, challenge.
- **ACTION** – Walk the listener through what steps you took to address the situation. This is the most significant and comprehensive part of your story; showing the fullness and richness of what you did. Typically, offers the most text compared to the introduction (situation/task) and conclusion (result).
- **RESULT** – What impact did you have on the situation? No matter how big or small, the listener wants to hear the outcome. (Tip: Quantify or qualify your results if you can – “Founded a group that grew to over 40 members in its first two years.” “Wrote a research paper that was used as the basis for future research for a faculty member in the biology department.” or “Presented my research at the national conference for chemistry students and academics.”)

Bottom Line Up Front

It is important to craft a personal statement that revolves around your understanding of the mission, purpose, and history of the award. Your goal is to **present yourself as the ideal fit for embodying and living out the ideals of the graduate program**. To deliver a convincing and compelling personal statement, you can use a **BLUF** (Bottom Line Up Front) approach:

- **PRESENT** – What do you care about *now*? At the outset, spell out your intellectual interest(s)—the core questions that tie your interests together. In theory (and in an ideal world), something related to these questions will come to form the heart of a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation. You need to make sure to articulate *why* you care about what you care about, as well. The most convincing presentations connect with a bigger question or problem—that is, with something readers should care about, too.
- **PAST** – Only after you have shared what you care about should you present *how* you came to care about it. In general, readers do not appreciate pure chronological or developmental approaches. BLUFing gives readers an end goal: they know where you are headed, so they can care about your story. Your job is also to provide evidence that you are setting yourself up for success later on: How do you *know* what you care about? Share what you have already accomplished, but also be reflective about it.

Bottom Line Up Front, continued

- **FUTURE** – So what? What are your goals and aspirations? Here it is particularly important to manifest the purposes of the scholarship scheme, how will a fellowship help you reach your goals? Additionally, as an example for the Beinecke Scholarship the foundation has a preference for applicants who are going to contribute to the scholarship of their chosen discipline (arts, humanities, and social sciences), to teach, to do scholarly work, and who are passionate about a specific area of study/studies.

If you have presented yourself well, the readers will *want* you to be able to reach the goals you present at the end of your personal statement. If you have not articulated why you care (PRESENT), skillfully demonstrated what you have done already to move toward your goals (PAST), and laid out a concrete future pathway (FUTURE), then your personal statement will lose marks on effectiveness.

General Proposal Style

- **INTRODUCTION**
 - Will typically include a central thesis or goal that will then be developed throughout the proposal, statement or essay;
 - May include a catchy opener, statement, or story that introduces you and your project;
 - Okay to write this portion at the beginning, middle or end of the writing process.
- **BODY**
 - State objectives of your central thesis or goal.
 - You may need to build upon your central thesis or goal through clearly stated objectives for the thesis or goal.
 - More depth on the context of the experience or project.
 - You need to provide a meaningful - personal and/or scholarly - context for your specific project. You also need to demonstrate reasonable familiarity with these questions or problems.
 - Specific questions related to experience or project.
 - What specific questions do you plan to address during the course of your investigations? Do you want to find out what accounts for certain behaviors, past or present? Are you interested in certain physical phenomena and why they occur in a certain way? What experiences do you want to have?
 - Methodology that will be used to answer your questions.
 - What activities will you undertake that will help you find answers to the questions you have posed? Will you administer questionnaires? Make specific observations, measurements, etc? Interview people? Keep a journal with detailed personal responses to specific settings, events, etc.? Who will fill out your questionnaire or participate in your interviews? What instruments will you need to make your observations? What is the schedule for your project? What type of approval or consent do you need?

General Proposal Style, BODY, continued

- Location – itinerary or site of the experience or project.
 - Where do you want to carry out your project? What country(ies)? Some fellowships require you to specify the institution or organization at which you will carry out your project; in other instances the program itself designates the institution. What do you know about that institution or organization? Why is it an ideal place for you to carry out your project? Are there specific individuals with whom you want to work or unique academic programs available at that institution or organization? Have you made contact with any individuals or programs at the institution, organization or within the country? Will you have access to needed facilities and resources.
- Qualifications to carry out the experience or project.
 - You must convince the funding organization or agency that you have the skills, experience, knowledge, and interest to carry out your project. In short, you must "sell" yourself, persuade the funding agency that you are a good "investment."
 - Are foreign language skills necessary to carry out your project? Do you have them? If not, do you have plans to acquire them?
 - Have you ever devised and administered a questionnaire, conducted a series of oral interviews?
 - Must you have had experience with certain laboratory or collection techniques? Do you have that experience?
 - Have you completed an independent research project?
 - Do you have any relevant experiences living, working and/or studying abroad?
 - What particular course work is relevant to the proposed project?
 - Is any of your work experience relevant to the project? Co-curricular experiences?
- May include anticipated or projected outcomes of the experience or project.
 - How will you know if your questions have been answered? What will you have to show for your efforts?
- **CONCLUSION**
 - Strong concluding statement -- without summarizing, repetition, or bringing up a new point.

QUALITY WRITING HAS ...

- **Clarity of Purpose** – clear purpose, goal or objective
- **Content** – specific, interesting, and relevant
- **Organization** – sense of structure, that is easy to follow
- **Style** – fits the fellowship requirements of level of formality, terminology used, or appropriateness of material
- **Presentation** – details are followed such as page number, word count, margin or font requirements; no typographical, spelling, grammar errors

REVIEWING YOUR WRITING

- Do not be afraid of writing drafts, because you will have many!
- Read your essays out loud.
- Set your draft aside overnight, to review it with an open mind the next day.
- Be willing and able to accept feedback and criticism.
- General Questions to Ask When Reviewing ...
 - What general impression does the essay give?
 - Does it show character? Is it distinguishable?
 - How effective is the opening?
 - Is there a central theme?
 - Is the essay well-organized?
 - Does the essay answer the prompt?
 - Are any statements made overly general?
 - Are there repetitive ideas in the essay?
 - Are there clichés?
 - Is there a part that can be more developed or clarified?
 - Is there cohesion between the paragraphs and sentences?
 - How well does the essay conclude vs summarize?
 - Spelling, grammar or punctuation errors?
 - How does this essay fit in with other components of the application – other essays, resume, educational attributes, or list of experiences?
- Be Fully Aware of Your Audience - Your proposal will be your first and perhaps only contact with the individuals who will be making a decision about your application. Ask yourself the following questions in preparing the final draft in relationship to the audience:
 - Do I describe my project in a manner that demonstrates how it meets the goals of the funding organization or agency?
 - Do I describe myself in a way that fits the criteria the organization or agency set forth as characteristic of a successful applicant?
 - Will an educated lay person be able to understand my project?
 - Will the reader know that I truly care about this project? Have I answered the "so what" question?
 - Do I lead my reader through the document in a manner that will make it easy for him or her to follow? Have I eliminated truly extraneous material? In many cases, readers will be asked to consider 25 or 30 proposals in a short amount of time. How would my proposal stand up to that test if it were number 30?
 - What overall impression does it leave with the reader.

LAST CHECK – DO’S AND DON’TS

DO

- Tell a story.
- Set yourself apart.
- Understand and explain yourself.
- Approach your topic with confidence.
- Answer the question(s).
- Grab the reader’s attention in the opening paragraph.
- Adhere to stated word limits.
- Try to maintain a positive and upbeat tone.
- Describe what you learned, not just what you did.

DON’T

- Fail to answer the prompt.
- Use a gimmicky quote or opener that goes nowhere.
- Include inappropriate material.
- Mention subjects that are potentially controversial (unless required).
- Make grammar or spelling mistakes.
- Over rely on spell check, utilize people to review your grammar and spelling.
- Just mention that you would contribute, that you are an analytical thinker or that you are a hardworker or teamplayer. Instead, *show don’t tell*. Be specific as to how you do these things. Give details about your strengths. Be concrete.

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