

HINTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL ESSAY

There are two main types of essays you may be asked to write. One is a personal statement; the other is a proposal or statement of intent.

1. A personal statement should be a narrative giving a picture of you as an individual. It should deal with your personal history, family background, influences on intellectual development, the educational and cultural opportunities (or lack of them) to which you have been exposed, and the ways in which these experiences have affected you. Include your special interests and abilities, career plans, and life goals, etc. It should not be a recording of facts already listed on the application or an elaboration of your statement of proposed study.
2. A proposal or statement of intent (or study) can be a number of things. It could be an explanation of why you should receive a bunch of money to study or it could be a detailed account of what you plan to do with all of that money.
3. Some scholarships have you combine your academic proposal inside the framework of a personal reflection.

General Advice:

- Think of your application as a whole with each part supplementing and supporting every other part. The selection committee will be looking for clarity, conviction, clear and organized thinking, and effective communication.
- Consider your audience. Write for an intelligent non-specialist. Make sure the terminology will be understandable to someone outside your field. The tone should be neither too academic nor too personal. Aim for economy, enthusiasm, and directness; eloquence is welcome, but not at the expense of substance or honesty.
- Make sure all information is accurate and can discuss in some detail anything you mention.
- Do not pad, but do not be falsely modest either. Just be yourself and give the selections committee an opportunity to get to know you.
- Plan to experiment and try completely different versions.
- Show your work to a number of readers whose comments you respect. Consult especially your department advisor and ask your readers to tell you what questions your essays raise that you might not have considered.
- Revise until you are happy that you have made these highly restrictive forms into effective reflections of who you are and what you want to do.
- Keep to word limits and all other guidelines.
- Proofread.

Personal Statement:

- Personal statements are short. Identify 3-4 points you want to develop and let other aspects of your application present the other important information. Use your personal statement to say what others could not say.
- Personal statements are read quickly and often in bulk. Yours should be a pleasure to read. It should start fast, quickly taking the reader into the heart of your discussion.
- Maintain focus. Establish a consistent story line. Consider one or two anecdotes that can help you focus and give a human face to your discussion.

- Use this discussion to present a compelling snapshot of who you are and what contributions you want to make, and to indicate what your priorities are and the kinds of intelligence and passion you bring to your work.
- You may also want to weave in some mention of any skills or resources that may particularly recommend you. Remember that this can be done through sharing and experience that shows a number of the qualities you want to convey rather than telling them.

Questions to consider in getting started on your personal statement:

- What ideas, books, courses, events have had a profound impact on you? How so?
 - To what extent do your current commitments reflect your most strongly-held values?
 - What errors or regrets have taught you something important about yourself?
 - When does time disappear for you? What does this tell you about your passions, your values?
 - When you have changed? Consider yourself before and after; what does this change mean?
- Start writing drafts. Experiment. You will know when a paragraph begins to gel.

Academic/Project Proposal—Common Elements:

- A description of your course of study or project; topic(s), research focus, degree goals, methodology, itinerary, and budget.
- Why you have chosen this course of study (at this particular institution, in this particular country/location).
- Or why you want to undertake this project in this particular setting.
- Evidence that your plans are consistent with your preparation, academic qualifications, and long-range goals.
- Perhaps why you are choosing a new area of study, or what makes your project particularly timely.

Combined Statements:

- This statement combines elements of the academic proposal within the framework of a personal reflection.
- It should not force an unrealistic unity.
- It should balance both components together effectively.
- The balance of these two aspects will vary according to what best represents you and your goals. (The Rhodes selection committee recommends no more than 1-2 paragraphs to present the academic proposal.)

Writing Sources:

On Writing Well, William Zinsser, Harper & Row.

Manual of Style, University of Chicago.

Elements of Style, Strunk and White, Macmillan (on-line at 222.bartleby.com/141/index.)

Graduate Admissions Essays: What Works, What Doesn't and Why, Donald Asher, Ten Speed Press.

Boston Univ. has sample successful essays online at <http://www.bu.edu/bufellow/successf.htm>

The Rhodes Scholarship, Louis Blair <http://www.rhodesscholar.org/truman>

SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER

Remember that the guidelines on the Fulbright website states:

The Curriculum Vitae should be a picture of you as an individual. It should be a personal/intellectual biography in narrative form, and should not repeat facts listed elsewhere on the application.

The website also states the following about the study or research plan:

Graduating seniors generally will be expected to attend regular university lectures, but they should describe the study programs they wish to follow in terms as specific as possible . . . and should be prepared to supplement lectures with independent work.

It goes on to state:

The best proposals begin with good ideas. Start by putting your ideas on paper, and list the goals and objectives of your project . . . consider the following questions and remember your audience. Avoid discipline-specific jargon. The individuals reading your proposal prefer you get to the point about the “who, what, when, where, why, and how” of the project.

With whom do you propose to work?

What do you propose to do? What is exciting, new or unique about your project? What contribution will the project make to the Fulbright objective of promoting cross-cultural interaction and mutual understanding?

When will you carry out your study or research? Include a timeline.

Where do you propose to conduct your study or research? Why is it important to go abroad to carry out your project?

Why do you want to do it? What is important or significant about the project?

How will you carry out your work? All students should discuss methodology and goals in their statements.

How will your project help further your academic or professional development?

In measuring feasibility, the following questions will help:

How will the culture and politics of the host country impact your work?

How do the resources of the host country support your project?

If employing such research methods as extensive interviewing and the use of questionnaires, how will you locate your subjects?

Is your language facility adequate? If not, how will you accomplish your work?

MORE TIPS: Curriculum Vitae and Statement of Proposed Study

The Fulbright Scholarship

The Fulbright Scholarship provides funds sufficient to complete a proposed research or study abroad project for one year. Applicants submit written outlines of their research or study plans, which may include a year of graduate study, original dissertation research, a creative or performing arts project, or a teaching assistantship. Because the study is undertaken abroad, applicants must have sufficient maturity, character, and literacy to work within the host country.

Composing a Curriculum Vitae and Statement of Proposed Study

The primary written portions of the Fulbright application are the curriculum vitae (CV) and statement of proposed study. Though most students are used to thinking of a CV as a resume (the terms are often used interchangeably), the Fulbright application defines a CV as a “personal/intellectual biography in narrative form.” The CV is your opportunity to discuss personal motivations, your experience and activities, and future goals. Though your examples should still be concrete, you have the room to reveal your personality— indeed many applicants view this as their chance to let the selectors know them as individually as possible, and they use lightly entertaining anecdotes to set themselves apart from other candidates. In plain terms, the goal is to write a CV that no other person could have written.

In writing the statement of proposed study or research, begin by making sure not to repeat material from other parts of the application unnecessarily, and present detail tailored as much as possible to the host country. If you can show that you have performed research on (or, better yet, *in*) the host country already and have made contacts with potential supervisors, you increase your odds of success dramatically. The Fulbright website cautions writers against the use of discipline-specific jargon, and a good rule of thumb is to define any jargon that you do use in context, keeping the focus of your proposal on addressing problems that will provide valuable contributions to society and within your field. Also, practicality and feasibility are principal concerns, so the best applicants provide a timeline, discuss their methodology and goals, and analyze such variables as the host country’s cultural and political climate and resources. Finally, of course, you must demonstrate as necessary your linguistic ability as it applies to the country and your proposed plan, especially if your primary goal is a teaching assistantship.

This information is excerpted from Joe Schall’s Writing Personal Statements and Scholarship Application Essays, Outernet Publishing, © 2006 by Joe Schall.