The personal statement for such fellowships as the Rhodes, Marshall, Mitchell, and Fulbright should not be a recapitulation of your admissions essay for college. Rather, it should be a serious examination of the intellectual and personal experiences that have motivated you to participate in this process and to pursue the particular project you are proposing in your application, and the ways in which your intellectual and personal experiences since entering college have informed your choices.

In fact writing the personal statement might be one of the most difficult writing projects you tackle. Why? Because writing a successful and effective personal statement requires that you accomplish a variety of seemingly contradictory tasks: writing about yourself (you are the subject) without seeming “me” oriented; expressing confidence without sounding arrogant; being both informative and persuasive; and believing in your project without sounding self-important. Striking the right balance and keeping the attention of your reader for the right reasons is your aim, but doing so can be troublesome. Following are a few pointers that we think will be helpful to you in the process of working on this statement over time:

1. What is your personal reason for writing this statement and engaging in the fellowship application process? What is your rhetorical purpose in writing this statement? What do you hope to achieve and how do you hope to affect your

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1 Please note that each fellowship is different. You should refer to the fellowship Web site for specific information and individual timelines, and to the end of this document for the personal statement requirements of each of the fellowships. The Fulbright, Marshall, Rhodes, Mitchell all require a personal statement and/or academic proposal. The guidelines above are meant to help you in getting started with your personal statement. Please note that the phrase “curriculum vitae” refers to the “personal statement.”
reader? In what ways must the personal statement be both informative and persuasive?

2. Who is your audience?
What do you know about the expectations and criteria of your audience?
How can you make yourself interesting and unique to your audience? How can you write about yourself without being boring or sounding self-absorbed? What can you do to really engage your audience’s interest?

3. What theme or over-arching idea can you use to hold your statement together, move the essay from paragraph one through the argument to the conclusion? Why is it important to have such a theme/thesis? How do you decide what it should be? In thinking about an over-arching theme, what can you say about yourself that makes you stand out in some way, the distinguishes from other applicants with the same high GPA, community service, and leadership experience? What is unusual and particularly interesting about you?

4. What is tone? What kind of tone should you use for the personal statement? What do you need to do to create a certain kind of tone? How can thinking about creating a tone appropriate to your purpose, audience, and theme help you? How might pretending to write as if your subject were someone else help you create the right tone?

5. How should you organize the argument of your personal statement? Why?

Second tier considerations:
Sentences—complexity, variety, appropriateness
Diction—appropriateness and effectiveness/avoid slang, etc
Coherence—flow and seamlessness
Correctness—grammar, punctuation, and clarity
Revision, revision, revision, revision:

- Distance yourself from your writing; put a first draft away for a day or two before revising it; use that process over and over.

- Do not be afraid to delete a phrase, sentence, paragraph, or idea that does not fit. Even though you may be attached to it, let it go if it doesn’t work—you can always use it another time in some other writing project.

- Read your essay out loud so that you can feel how it “sounds.” Even better, have someone else read it out loud to you.

- If you are having a problem with a particular aspect of the essay, try doing it in a completely different way; for example, if you don’t think the “organization” is working quite right, reverse the order of your paragraphs to see what you can learn; if you are not quite pleased with the tone, take your first-person personal voice and cast it in third-person to see what you can learn.

- Ask yourself the following questions:
  
  Is your introductory paragraph interesting? How so?
  Is the direction of your essay clear from the first paragraph?
  Do you establish a clear theme that will guide how the essay develops?
    What is it and why is it appropriate?
  Do you establish a relationship with your audience that will compel them to become interested in what you have to say?
  Does your statement have continuity and focus and a successful organizational structure? How can you tell?—check your “theme” against each paragraph; check each sentence within each paragraph
  Does your statement have an appropriate tone—informative, persuasive, and engaging? How can you tell?—check your sense of “purpose” and “audience” against each paragraph and against each sentence within each paragraph
  Is your conclusion interesting? How so? Does it pull things together and at the same time bow to the future, to something just slightly beyond the scope of the essay? Why is this important?
  Have you paid attention to diction, sentence flow, and correctness?
Follow Instructions

Be sure to follow the specific instructions for the particular fellowship to which you are applying:

**Marshall:**
“Provide a short statement (not more than 1000 words) describing your academic and other interests and pursuits.”

**Mitchell:**
“Provide a signed short personal statement describing the applicant’s academic and other interests. This statement should describe the specific area of proposed study and reason for an interest in study at the Irish or Northern Ireland institution. The statement must conclude with the following signed statement: “I certify that this essay is my own work” (This personal essay must not exceed 1,000 words in length and should be written in as simple and direct manner as possible. It must be set in a typeface no smaller than 10 points. The selection committee will place special emphasis on this personal essay.)”

**Rhodes:**
“Provide a signed short personal statement describing the applicant’s academic and other interests. This statement should describe the specific area of proposed study and the applicant’s reasons for wishing to study at Oxford, and it must conclude with the following signed statement: “I certify that this essay is my own work.” This personal essay must not exceed 1,000 words in length and should be written in as simple and direct manner as possible. It should be set in a typeface no smaller than 10 points. Selection committees will place special emphasis on this personal essay, and it will be sent to Oxford colleges to which Rhodes Scholars-elect apply for admission.”

**Fulbright:**
“This statement should be a narrative giving a picture of yourself as an individual. It should deal with your personal history, family background, influences on your 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. Also 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. Please limit to space provided [approx. 500 words].”