Writing the Fulbright Personal Statement

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What is Fulbright looking for?

- Highly motivated candidates
- Open-minded individuals
- Cultural ambassadors
- Leadership qualities
- Interest in community involvement
- Ability to do what you’re applying to do
Personal Statement Prompt:

• “The 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 Grant Purpose.

It is more of a biography, but specifically related to you and your aspirations relative to the Fulbright Program.” (emphasis added)
Purpose

• Previously known as the “Narrative CV”
• Intellectual statement/biography with a focus on academic and/or professional commitments and campus or community activities, to which a serious commitment was made, or from which leadership potential is clearly demonstrated.
• Not a reiteration of family history, personal history irrelevant to the proposal, etc.
• Enables committee members to get a feel of you as a person, form a judgment regarding your seriousness of purpose, adaptability, interest in your project, international education, cross-cultural communication, etc.
Format

• 1 single-spaced page
• 1-inch margins, Times New Roman 12-point font
• Title:

PERSONAL STATEMENT

Your name, country of application, field of study or English Teaching Assistantship
Things to consider...

- What is your reason for applying for Fulbright?
- What do you hope to achieve with the Personal Statement and how do you hope to affect your reader?
- In what ways must the Personal Statement be both informative and persuasive?
Take 5 minutes on one:

- What errors or regrets have taught you something important about yourself?
- When have you been so immersed in what you were doing, that time seemed to evaporate while you were actively absorbed?
- What ideas, books, theories or movements have made a profound impact on you – be honest.
- To what extent do your current commitments reflect your most strongly-held values?
- Under what conditions do you do your best, most creative work?
- To what extent are you a typical product of your generation and/or culture? How might you deviate from the norm?
- When did you become fascinated by the idea of studying in the host country? Why?
The Uniqueness Challenge

• What theme can you use to hold your statement together to 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 a theme, what can you say about yourself that distinguishes you from other applicants with the same high GPA, community service, and leadership experience?
  • How do you advocate for yourself, without sounding arrogant?

• What is unusual and particularly interesting about you?
  • How do you write movingly of your interests and passions, without clichés or too much sentimentality?
Audience

- 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?
Brainstorm

• What's special, unique, distinctive, interesting and/or impressive about you or your life story?
• Why should the reader remember you?

ADJECTIVES
Introduction

• Set the tone in the first paragraph—don’t waste it!
• Consider the readers—make them want to keep reading.

• A few examples to consider, good and bad...
Body

• Explain yourself with concrete examples.
  • Avoid “air”
  • Don’t restate, but draw from your CV and illustrate your interests/experience/knowledge
• Explain how your trajectory has been logical
  • How you got from point A to point B
  • How that journey will lead you to point C in the future
• Will the reader have specific questions about your resume or transcripts?
  • Address honestly and briefly only if it warrants explanation
Conclusion

• Need to have one, even if just a sentence or two.
  • Interesting?
  • Pull things together?
  • Reflect your vision?
  • Nod to the future?

Examples to consider:
Initial Drafting

• Brainstorm
  • List some experiences you think you may want to discuss in the Personal Statement.
  • For each, write some notes about:
    • Why did you choose to get involved in that activity?
    • What did you do in that activity?
    • What did you learn (hard skills and about yourself) as a result of being involved in that activity?
    • Are you still involved, or did it lead you to something else?
Initial Drafting

- Look at the whole application
  - What experiences can be adequately represented in other areas of the application?
  - What needs to be expanded upon in the essays?
  - How can you reflect on those experiences more deeply/convey different information in the essays?
- Don’t worry about the page limit at first
  - Write everything, then edit and make choices
Revision, Revision, Revision!

- Distance yourself from your writing
- Remove anything that does not fit (save for later)
- Ask Yourself:
  - Overall, is it interesting and easy to read?
  - Does it show, rather than tell, who you are?
  - Does it demonstrate your interest, motivation, and ability?
  - Does it make the reader want to know you better?
  - Do you repeat information included in other parts of your application? Omit repetitive information unless it’s necessary for further explanation or emphasis.

- Grammar & spelling!
Seek Critical Feedback

• Have several people read and critique it
  - Someone who knows you really well
  - Someone who doesn’t know you well at all
  - Advisers, faculty, mentors
  - Friends, family members, other applicants, etc.
  - People you are asking for letters of recommendation

• Read it out loud to yourself and/or a friend
  - Does it flow logically both internally and with the rest of the application?
  - Does anything trip you up?
Pre-Writing Exercises

Take 5 minutes on one or more:

• Strengths
• Weaknesses
• Watershed moments in your life
• Mentors
• Reasons behind your choice of major
• A film about yourself
Resources

• Me!

• Odegaard Writing Center
  http://depts.washington.edu/owrc/

• *Writing Personal Statements* online manual by Joe Schall
  https://www.e-education.psu.edu/writingpersonalstatementsonline/