



## **Fulbright Personal Statements: Tips & Guidelines**

The U.S. Fulbright Personal Statement is 250 words narrative designed to give the reviewers a picture of you as an individual. It is an opportunity to tell the committee more about the trajectory that you have followed and what plans you have for the future. Whereas the *Statement of Grant Purpose* focuses on what you will be doing in the host country, the Personal Statement concentrates on how your background has influenced your development and how that relates to the Fulbright opportunity.

The statement can deal with your personal history, family background, intellectual development, and the educational, professional, or cultural opportunities to which you have or have not been exposed; explain their impact. This should not be a reiteration of facts already listed in the Biographical Data sections or an elaboration of the Statement of Grant Purpose.

### **Important Ideas to Keep in Mind**

#### **The big question is: “Why you?”**

While the Statement of Grant Purpose explains what you want to do, the Personal Statement explains why. The Personal Statement allows reviewers to understand how your motivations, interests, ambitions and values have shaped the way you think about and engage with the world around you. Reviewers want to know that you are not applying to Fulbright on a whim, but how your personal journey has led you to apply for the fellowship.

#### **Show, don’t tell.**

Use examples that showcase characteristics you wish to highlight about yourself, rather than simply stating what characteristics you hold. Instead of saying, “I am passionate about bridging barriers between different cultures,” you could instead talk about a service trip in which you facilitated workshops on conflict mediation using both English and Spanish. It is not enough to simply express your “interest” or “fascination” with a particular topic. Show what efforts you have made so far in the pursuit of your topic of interest.

#### **This is your only space for reviewers to get to know you on a deeper level.**

Remember, applicants are not interviewed on the national level. The personal statement is all that the reviewers have to draw conclusions about your overall characters, motivations, attitudes and outlooks.

#### **Be authentic! There’s no one way to write a personal statement.**

As many tips as there are out there for constructing a personal statement, remember to stay true to your own voice!



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## **Personal Statement Format**

**For Study/Research: Academic, Study/Research: Creative & Performing Arts, and ETA**

- Length is limited to a maximum of 250 words. Longer statements will not be presented to the screening committee.

## **Brainstorming**

**Research the host country.** Think about why you are genuinely interested in the host country. Based on your personality and characteristics, how do you foresee yourself interacting with the local population, culture, way of life, etc.? What is it about your experiences that illustrate the many reasons your work must take place in this country specifically?

**Get deep.** Avoid talking about surface culture (“I enjoy the food and traditional holiday celebrations”), but rather, talk about how you would engage in “deep culture” (social norms, concepts of self vs. group, familial structures, challenges in local government, etc.). The more nuanced you can get, the better. Learn more about Edward T. Hall’s **Cultural Iceberg Theory**: <http://bit.ly/2cD00ns>

**Draft your initial content for the two essays together; divide it up later.**

Sometimes, applicants can get caught up mentally categorizing their content into either the Statement of Grant Purpose or Personal Statement that it hinders the initial brainstorming process. Once you have an initial draft, you can then start to parse out content based on the category criteria. *Ultimately, the Personal Statement should complement the Statement of Grant Purpose without duplicating information.*

## **Writing Techniques**

**Open your piece with an engaging hook.**

Strive for a fresh, narrative quality that sounds like you. This can be a powerful anecdote or vivid memory that relates to your passion or research topic. Avoid a hook with an overgeneralized statement (e.g. “Cultural diversity is important in a globalized society.”)

**Stay on-message. Be concise. Omit non-relevant details.**

Remember, you only have one-page. Avoid repeating details that the reviewer can find in other parts of your application, unless you are weaving a particular accomplishment into a larger narrative.

**Highlight the most salient aspects of your personal identity or identities.**

These are aspects of your identity that have shaped who you are as a person and your outlooks on life. Some examples include family background, immigration experiences, cultural heritage, multiculturalism, or identities related to race, gender, sexual orientation, political beliefs, ability, education. Ideally, you are mentioning aspects of your identity that relate back to your Grant Purpose and your motivations for pursuing a Fulbright.



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**Avoid listing out your accomplishments.**

This is not a resume. Engage with the specific guidelines and expectations, but avoid doing so formulaically. Instead, you should select accomplishments that make sense given the theme(s) you are conveying within the Personal Statement. There are other spaces in the application to list out the rest of your achievements.

**Identify the “A-ha” moments.**

Illustrate events in your life that have sparked personal transformation, challenged your way of thinking, or pushed you to develop emotionally, intellectually and socially. It is important that these moments are not events that have simply happened to you (e.g. “My family and I moved around a lot when I was growing up”). Explain how these moments or experiences have propelled you to take action steps towards positive change.

**Develop a chronological and thematic structure.**

A strong personal statement is one that charts your personal growth over time. Make sure that the overall theme of your personal statement complements your Statement of Grant Purpose. For example, if you are applying for an ETA, your personal statement could tie in different experiences in your life that all relate back to education and your passion for community engagement.

**Avoid clichés, stereotypes, platitudes, and overly sentimental language.** It is great to share service-oriented accomplishments, but avoid anecdotes that convey a “savior vs. victim” sentiment. For example, “I felt joy and gratitude when I saw the smiles on those impoverished children.” Keep in mind that Fulbright is looking for candidates who can learn from cultures and populations, so focus on concrete and substantive experiences you have had in facilitating cultural exchange.

## Getting Feedback

**Request feedback on your drafts from a variety of people.**

This includes mentors, professors, colleagues, supervisors, and consultants at the Writing Center. Keep in mind that everyone will give slightly different advice, and at times you may even receive conflicting advice from various sources. It is up to you to collect as much feedback as possible, synthesize the information, and tailor it to what fits best with the authenticity of your narrative.

**Engage a competent and trustworthy proofreader.** After many drafts, it is nearly impossible to proofread your own work. It is important that you consult with others not only for content-related feedback, but to critically read through your drafts for grammatical and spelling errors as well.

**Plan accordingly. Give your reviewers plenty of notice.**

Be sure to notify your reviewers ahead of time, and expect additional turnaround time for them to provide adequate feedback. Respect the time of faculty members and advisors, because they may not be able to respond right away. These may be the same people from whom you may be requesting letters of recommendation as part of your Fulbright application.



**Be patient.**

For high-stakes application essays, you can expect to work through up to 10 - 12 drafts before your statements are ready to submit! Know that writing is a process, and it takes a lot thinking and critiquing to ensure your work is top quality.

Works Cited & Additional Resources

<http://blog.owu.edu/writingcenter/files/2012/07/Fulbright-Personal-Statements-guide-and-Sample-Essays.pdf>

[http://www.hope.edu/crossroads/PDFs/16\\_Writing-Requirements.pdf](http://www.hope.edu/crossroads/PDFs/16_Writing-Requirements.pdf)