WRITING YOUR FELLOWSHIP APPLICATION
Spring 2012

Nationally Competitive Fellowship and Scholarship Prompts

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. **First and foremost you should always follow the ‘prompt(s)’ of the fellowship or scholarship.**

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.

Preparing for the Writing Process

- **Research**
  - Understand the purpose of the fellowship and foundation.
  - What are the characteristics of a successful candidate?
  - Audience - who is reviewing applications at the Colgate and Foundation level?
- **Evaluate Fit**
  - 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?
- **Think and Reflect**
  - Once you have acquired this information, take some time to think and reflect on what you have learned and where you should go from here.
- **More Research**
  - If you decide to pursue the fellowship award, you will be faced with more research on your topic to acquire the information to formulate a proposal. Then organize your ideas.
- **Start Writing**
  - Everyone is unique in how they face that initial draft. Start with an outline, mind-map, grouping of ideas, or free-write.
  - Do not worry about perfection in this first draft, just get your ideas on paper.
  - It is also suggested that at first do not over-worry about character, word or page limit.
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. 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 semester. 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. 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 she is sensitive to the plight of others and, like most humans, feels vulnerable to a sense of defeat: “I was at first disheartened.” She is also, however—and most importantly—someone who rises to a challenge, specifically by applying relevant and helpful skills and resources.

**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 helps the audience visualize you. We recommend that you create a story using the following Situation Action Result (SAR) 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 SAR stories to write and describe your experiences. This is also an exercise in preparing for and responding to interview questions.

- **Situation** – 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.

- **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 professionals.”)
Elements of a Proposal, Statement or Essay

- Elements are dependent upon the fellowship application prompt(s).

- **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?
  - 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."

  o Are foreign language skills necessary to carry out your project? Do you have them? If not, do you have plans to acquire them?
  o Have you ever devised and administered a questionnaire, conducted a series of oral interviews?
  o Must you have had experience with certain laboratory or collection techniques? Do you have that experience?
  o Have you completed an independent research project?
  o Do you have any relevant experiences living, working and/or studying abroad?
  o What particular course work is relevant to the proposed project?
  o 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.

✓ What general impression do you get of the person from the essay? Does it show their character? Did they distinguish themselves?

Qualities of Strong Writing

✓ 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 do you get of the person from the essay?
  - Does it show his or her character?
  - Did they distinguish themselves?
  - How effective is the opening?
  - Is there a central theme?
  - Is the essay well-organized?
  - Does the essay answer the prompt?
  - Does the proposal describe how the project meets the goals of the funding organization?
  - Does the essay describe how the person fits the criteria of the funding organization?
  - What parts are most vivid and clear?
  - Are any statements made overly general?
  - Are there repetitive ideas in the essay?
  - Did you discover any cliches?
  - 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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