

FULBRIGHT US STUDENT PROGRAM GRANTS

**Personal Statement Workshop for
Study/Research and ETA Applicants**

What is the Personal Statement?

- It's a kind of intellectual autobiography, often with a central focus or theme, in which you discuss your academic credentials and accomplishments along with selected and revealing life experiences.
- A one-page document that is formatted as follows:
 - Single spacing
 - Times New Roman font, size 12
 - Standard 1" margins
 - A two-line heading that reads
 - PERSONAL STATEMENT
 - Name, Country, Field (if S/R), Grant Type

Strong Personal Statements

- Reveal the person behind the experiences and academic accomplishments and credentials
- Illustrate that you can be a representative “ambassador” for the program and your country
- Show that you have the adaptability and character traits suited for this experience
- Show how you have prepared—or continue to prepare—for the program
- Convey your sincerity, maturity, integrity, ethics, and, more generally, strength of character
- Demonstrate your intellectual ability, creativity, and analytical and problem-solving skills
- Demonstrate your written communication skills

Understand Thy Audience

- The Fulbright Program offers you and other recent graduates invaluable international and cross-cultural experience. Your statement should demonstrate that you have what it takes to:
 - Adapt to life in the host country and take part in the culture
 - Be open to gaining a deeper understanding from beliefs and traditions that are unfamiliar to you through community engagement
 - Promote international cooperation & fellowship between the US and the host country.

Understand Thy Audience

- Committee members will read your essay with the Fulbright mission and philosophy in mind. Make the mission your mantra!
- Members of the [National Selection Committee](#) include professors and former Fulbright winners group of intelligent but non-specialist readers. Members of the [Host Country Commissions](#) include professors, Fulbright scholars abroad, and government officials.
- Tired, bored readers will have little patience for predictable storylines, encompassing statements, clichés, insincerity, and gimmicks.
 - So, don't waste their time—be specific, make every word count, and get their attention with a strong opening sentence.

Selecting a Topic—Do's and Don'ts

- Avoid summarizing information or writing a resume in paragraph form. As noted on the “Personal Statement” page of the Fulbright site, the essay “is . . . specifically related to you and your aspirations relative to the Fulbright Program”
- Discuss “concrete” experiences that illuminate your qualifications; avoid abstract ideas and general topics.
- Focus on recent history, and avoid statements like the following one: “I’ve wanted to be an environmental scientist since 2nd grade.” You can include personal references to experiences you had at a younger age, but this is a document that paints a picture of you as a professional.

Selecting a Topic—Do's and Don'ts

- Avoid focusing on religious themes and experiences.
- Focus on academic and professional goals and interests. Explain how the Fulbright experience will prepare you for graduate school and/or your professional life.
- If necessary, you can include an explanation for poor grades or a weak academic performance, but do so briefly and in a positive way. Explain the situation and avoid making excuses. Focusing on achievements or strengths may be the best antidote for academic blemishes.

Brainstorming

Consider the following questions and list as many ideas as come to you. Don't filter yourself—this is only pre-writing.

- What **details of your life** have shaped it most? People? Places? Events? Circumstances?
- What **obstacles** have you had to overcome?
- What educational, professional, or cultural **opportunities** have you experienced?
- What have been your life's "**turning points**"?
- What are your **perspectives** or **philosophies**?
- What **led you to apply** for a Fulbright grant to this host country?
- What are your major **goals**? How does Fulbright fit into those plans?
- What **events in the news** have most shaped your thinking?

Samples

Read through the first sample personal statement. As you read, mark the kinds of things you just brainstormed:

- Life details: people, places, events, circumstances
- Obstacles: economic, family, physical, educational
- Turning points
- Opportunities: educational, professional, cultural
- Personal characteristics
- Philosophies, perspectives
- Goals
- Connection with the Fulbright mission

General Style Tips

For specific help with editing, work with a writing tutor and with your Fulbright faculty mentor. Because everyone struggles with different issues of style and correctness, one-on-one help is always best.

You probably don't need to hear that you need to proofread carefully before submitting your application: Your essays should be error-free. Some less obvious style tips include:

- Avoid [clichés](#) like the plague.
- Avoid overly emotional language.
- Use specific names for places and specific numbers for time.
- Use strong actors (nouns) and actions ([verbs](#)).

Tips and Resources

- See the [LMU ONIF](#) site for writing guides for each grant type (the navigation menu on the left will guide you to the proper grant category).
- The [Purdue OWL](#) offers many resources on writing personal statements. Their [“Top 10 Rules and Pitfalls”](#) might be particularly useful.
- Don't forget to review (and re-review) the instructions on the Fulbright website. The section on [Academic Application Components](#) contains the description that we looked at today of both essays.
- A number of websites offer sample essays. Sometimes, looking at samples can be the best way to get your head around what effective essays do and do not include. In addition to the samples from LMU provided today, you can find sample essays online from [Penn State](#), [Temple University](#) and [Ohio Wesleyan University](#), among others.

Instructions for Fulbright Application

- Enter your basic information.
- Once you've filled out the basic info, you'll see a number of links: Overview, Application Form, Essays, Affiliation, etc. Click on "Application Form." Question #5 on that form will enable you to select LMU as the institution through which you are applying. Then, click "Save" (located at the top right). Once you've done this, I'll see you in the system.