



# Writing a Personal Statement for Fellowships and Awards



## **What is a personal statement?**

Writing Sample

Introduction

Persuasion Essay

Demonstration of skill/merit/fit



# Preparation I: Looking at You

- Unique attributes of your personal life story
- Your field of interest (and why you chose it)
- Personal success factors
- Goals (short and long term)
- What are you hoping to do with this potential award and how might it help you achieve your goal?
- Values, interests, and skills





# Preparation II: Looking at Them

## What is the program looking for in ideal candidates?

- Carefully read the program's promotional materials for mission, vision, values, current research, etc.
- Talk to current fellows/awardees who succeeded in acquiring the award
- Speak with organization representatives about what they are seeking

## What is the award committee specifically asking for?

- **READ** the question prompts carefully and be sure to answer EVERY aspect of the prompt
- Speak to how you meet the specified qualifications
- Speak to how your values/goals/aspirations match those of the organization



# Preparation III: Group Exercise

Take the next couple of minutes to answer the following on paper:

1. What field are you currently considering?
2. Name 2-3 things that sparked your interest in your field.
3. How did you discover these three things?



*Let a partner read what you wrote.*

*...THEN...*

*Discuss your answers with a partner.*



# Tips for Writing: Format & Style



## Readability is key

- Easy-to-read font, size 11 or 12, 0.5" – 1" margins
- Attend to word limits and page limits
- Attend to formatting guidelines

## Language

- Use the first person
- Be authentic – do not write in a voice other than your own in an attempt to impress the reader.



# Tips for Writing the Body



- **Set up your essay in the first paragraph.**  
Remember: Thesis, support, support, support, conclusion!
- **Use transition sentences** at the end of each paragraph. Help move the reader through the flow of your changing thoughts.
- **ANSWER THE PROMPT**
- Use appropriate **spelling and grammar**



# Tips for Writing the Opening Statement

- Avoid gimmicks or clichés
  - **“My name is Malia Obama. Just kidding– did I get your attention?”** -- **NO!** Are you taking this seriously?
  - **“The purpose of this statement is to submit my application for the \_\_\_\_\_ fellowship.”** – **NO!** I’m already bored.
  - **“I believe the children are our future.”** – **NO!** That is a song. An old song. And it’s a given.
- Be authentic! Authenticity inspires interest
  - **“One might ask themselves, ‘What is the responsibility of the one to the many’ in this day and age.”** – **NO!** Do you really talk like that?
- Draw the reader in– leave them wanting to read more
  - **“When I was twelve, I had an experience that would change my life forever.”** – **YES!** What happened?
  - **“Every morning when I wake up, the first thing I do is dance.”** -- **YES!** Really? That’s different...why do you do that?
  - **“There is an old abandoned building on the corner of Main and Palm in my hometown called ‘Alder’s Mill.’”** – **YES!** What is so special about Alder’s Mill? How will this relate to our application and award?





# Content & Theme: Open Prompts

**“Write a personal statement consisting of 500 – 1000 words.”**

You may want to:

- Tell a story/Review personal history (keep it relevant!)
- Discuss goals/aspirations/what you will do with the award
- Explain why you feel alignment with the organization/purpose of the award and how it will help you achieve your goals/further their cause



# Content & Theme: Structured Prompts

**“Proposal—Please summarize your proposed research project on community associations. The project topic must have potential of furthering understanding of residential community associations and benefit the Foundation.”**

You may want to:

- Describe your project in-detail
- Describe the community you hope to assist and what aspects of the project will provide benefit
- Link aspects of the Foundation’s mission, vision, values, and/or projects to the initiatives of your project— focus on RESULTS!



## Exercise:

# What Should You Write About?

### Open Prompt

The mission of BDIS is to inspire, empower and support underrepresented groups students in the pursuit of STEM careers through platforms that include knowledge sharing, self-discovery and creating life-balance.

#### **What we do**

Through an array of programs and services, BDIS inspires and supports underrepresented groups throughout their academic training and careers. BDIS exposes young people to STEM disciplines and encourages underrepresented groups to pursue STEM fields using the encouragement of role models and support networks, while equipping them with the personal skills needed for success. For college students, where underrepresented students often feel isolated and discouraged in their field, BDIS serves a vital role in providing peer-support, camaraderie, and opportunities for growth. For those working in STEM-related careers, BDIS is a resource for identifying talent and an oasis for idea-sharing amongst a uniquely-compiled network of peers.



# Exercise:

## What Should You Write About?

### Structured Prompt (Ford Foundation)

3. **Personal Statement** (maximum two pages, 12-point font, double-spaced) describing the applicant's background and experience and commitment to the goals of the Ford Foundation Fellowship Programs by addressing *all* of the following that apply:

- the applicant's capacity to respond in pedagogically productive ways to the learning needs of students from diverse backgrounds
- the applicant's sustained personal engagement with communities that are underrepresented in the academy and ability to bring this asset to learning, teaching, and scholarship at the college or university level
- the applicant's likelihood of using the diversity of human experience as an educational resource in teaching and scholarship, and
- the applicant's membership in one or more of the following groups whose underrepresentation in the American professoriate has been severe and longstanding:
  - Alaska Natives (Aleut, Eskimo, or other Indigenous People of Alaska)
  - Black/African Americans
  - Mexican Americans/Chicanas/Chicanos
  - Native American Indians
  - Native Pacific Islanders (Hawaiian/Polynesian/Micronesian)
  - Puerto Ricans

Applicants should describe past and ongoing community service efforts such as:

- Tutoring and mentoring students in challenging environments
- Participation in housing or public service projects
- Leadership and organizational skills that benefit a larger community
  - Campus-based student activities
  - Language teaching
  - Involvement in professional organizations that serve the community

Applicants should note anything in their background that speaks to their unique perspective:

- Membership of a group designated by the Ford Foundation Fellowship Programs as currently underrepresented in the American professoriate
- Membership of another underserved group
- First person or generation in family to achieve college degree or seek advanced degree

Applicants may also cite the following:

- Teaching methods and academic interests that are inclusive and sensitive to diversity
- Any successes that can be attributed to using new techniques to create an inclusive and respectful teaching and learning environment
- Personal goals, both long-standing and future-focused, that involve increasing understanding in the college or university setting and are in the broader context
- Employment that demonstrates a long-standing commitment to diversity and depth of understanding of a multicultural society
- Efforts to improve access and opportunity for all, particularly in one's local community (neighborhood, place of worship, geographic region)



# Writing Strategies

- Highlight/underline the main questions of the prompt and answer each in short-form, then weave it all together
- Free-write about your goals and dreams related to your work. When you are done, re-read to see how many of the prompt items you answered unknowingly. Go on from there.
- Write a bare-bones format for the document with thesis, support, support, support, conclusion. Fill in the blanks.



# Rules to Write By\*

- DEPTH over BREADTH
- Provide insight into what drives you
- Balance creativity with authenticity
- When sharing life experiences, connect them to your professional goals
- Have someone else (ideally several others) read over your personal statement and give you feedback.



\* Adapted from Mark Stewart's *Perfect Personal Statements*



# Common Mistakes to Avoid\*

- Repeating information provided elsewhere in your application
- Complaining about your circumstances in life
- “Preaching” to the reader or discussing controversial topics
- Talking about money as a motivator
- Cliché introduction or conclusion; use of gimmicks
- Exceeding word/page limit
- Failure to tailor to organization (make sure you have the organization’s name right!)



\* Adapted from Mark Stewart’s *Perfect Personal Statements*



# Evaluating Your Personal Statement

- Proofread!
- Strategically choose people to critique your personal statement
  - Begin with a trusted **friend** to clean up language and grammar
  - Utilize services offered by the **Office of Graduate Fellowships and Awards**
  - Stop by **The Career Center** for help from a Career Advisor
  - Take it to a **professor** in the field you are applying for
  - Pass it on to people who are writing your **recommendations**
- What should you look for in your critiques?
  - See the *Personal Statement Guide* & use the Personal Statement evaluation chart at [www.career.fsu.edu](http://www.career.fsu.edu)





# Come See Us!

The Career Center is located in the Dunlap Success Center (DSC)



**Drop in Career Advising**

M-F 9:00 AM – 4:30 PM

**Extended Tuesday hours:**

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