

Tips for Writing a Personal Essay

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Broadly: **Tell a story, make it easy to read, and easy to remember**

Concretely:

- 1) **Think about why you're writing the essay and who will read it.**
Why do you want this fellowship? How does it fit into your life? Who will be reading the essay?
- 2) **Think about what makes you interesting and different.**
Everyone is unique—but can you connect the parts of your resume to tell a story?
- 3) **Show personal interest in the project.**
Weave references to the project into your life story.
- 4) **Show intellectual curiosity.**
Fellowships are for self-motivated people who want to explore the world and will take advantage of the opportunity to do so. Show past interest in events or places, and that you have taken advantage of opportunities.
- 5) **Show academic learning and achievement.**
Fellowships generally include studying. Describe what you've studied and why to make yourself a better candidate for continued studying on the fellowship.
- 6) **Use shorter prose.**
Readers have a lot to get through and are liable to discard your essay if it doesn't hold their attention. Aim for something closer to a newspaper article than your senior thesis.
- 7) **Use a hook or lead to the essay.**
As with newspaper articles, an anecdote or interesting fact will pull readers in to read the rest.
- 8) **Have a catchy conclusion.**
Don't just summarize everything. Try to include a new fact or even statement about the future—for example, where the fellowship will take your life.
- 9) **Write and then come back to the essay later.**
Spending time revising is important, but so is having a mental break between revisions. You'll come up with new ideas when you're not writing and also notice more when you do come back.
- 10) **Have others read your essay.**
A crucial step many miss. Ask Ms. Gagnon, professors, roommates, parents, or anyone else you trust to give you their thoughts.