



# How to Write a Personal Statement

## For Fellowship Applications

Writing a personal statement is an essential component of some fellowship applications. It is a snapshot of who you are as a scholar/researcher, an invitation to get to know you, an indication of your priorities and judgment, and an opportunity to demonstrate a strong connection to the target program. What's more, your personal statement is your story, and while everyone has a story to tell, it may require serious self-reflection and creativity to draft. Tip: Seek feedback from colleagues and mentors to gain valuable perspectives and insights.

Here's what the ACLS says about personal statements for their fellowship applications: *"The goal of this statement is to help our peer reviewers understand the connection between the scholar and their project. (Scholarship is not conducted in a vacuum of perfect detachment, devoid of personal perspective and experience.) You might choose to include information about your motivations for pursuing a particular topic of study or methodology, or how your teaching and working conditions inform your approach to your proposed research, or other information about you that would illuminate your trajectory as a scholar."*

By crafting an authentic and compelling personal statement that highlights your unique strengths and potential, you increase your chances of standing out and making a strong case for why you are an exceptional candidate. Here are some ideas that may be helpful when writing a personal statement:

### PREPARATION PHASE

- **Understand the Purpose and Criteria:** Begin by thoroughly understanding the purpose of the fellowship and the criteria on which applications will be evaluated. Review the application guidelines, selection criteria, and any specific prompts or questions provided. It is also essential to be aware of the context in which your personal statement will be reviewed and consider how it complements other components of your application. This will help you align your personal statement with the expectations of the selection committee.
- **Consider Your Audience:** Tailor your personal statement to the expectations and values of the specific fellowship to which you are applying. Research the organization's mission, values, and goals, and demonstrate how your own values align with theirs.
- **Reflect on Your Research and Impact:** Reflect on your research accomplishments, contributions to your field, and the impact of your work. Consider the specific research projects, publications, presentations, collaborations, or innovations that highlight your expertise, originality, and potential for further contributions. Identify the key themes and achievements that you want to emphasize in your personal statement.

### WRITING PHASE

- **Develop a Compelling Narrative:** Craft a narrative that showcases your unique background, research journey, and motivations. Tell a story that highlights your passion, curiosity, and dedication to your field of study. Describe the challenges you have faced and the lessons you have learned, demonstrating resilience, adaptability, and a commitment to overcoming obstacles.
- **Define Your Goals and Objectives:** Clearly articulate your short-term and long-term goals and how they align with the objectives of the fellowship. Explain how the funding and support provided by the fellowship will enhance your research, facilitate your professional growth, and enable you to make a broader impact in your field.
- **Address Your Fit with the Fellowship:** Showcase how your research interests, expertise, and career goals align with the specific focus areas and objectives of the fellowship. Highlight the synergies between your research agenda and the mission or goals of the funding organization. Articulate how your past experiences and accomplishments have shaped your aspirations and prepared you for the next step.
- **Provide Supporting Evidence:** Back up your claims and statements with concrete evidence. Include specific examples, data, outcomes, or testimonials that illustrate the impact and value of your research. This evidence will reinforce your credibility and enhance the persuasiveness of your personal statement.
- **Showcase your Uniqueness:** Highlight what sets you apart from other applicants. Emphasize your distinctive qualities, experiences, perspectives, and achievements. Demonstrate how your background and individuality contribute to your potential for success in the field or program.



## WRITING STYLE

- **Tailor Your Personal Statement:** Customize your personal statement for each fellowship application. Adjust the emphasis, language, and examples to align with the specific requirements and evaluation criteria of each opportunity. Avoid generic statements or using the same personal statement for multiple applications.
- **Stay True to Yourself:** While it's important to tailor your statement to the specific opportunity, remember to stay true to your own voice and values. Avoid trying to present yourself as someone you think the committee wants to see. The personal statement should be an honest representation of who you are and what you hope to achieve.
- **Maintain a Strong Narrative Thread:** Create a cohesive and engaging narrative that flows smoothly from one paragraph to another. Use transitional phrases to connect ideas and maintain a logical progression throughout your personal statement. Adhere to the word limit and avoid unnecessary tangents or unrelated information. Keep your writing clear, concise, and to the point. Every sentence should contribute to your overall message and purpose.

## FINALIZATION PHASE

- **Seek Feedback and Revise:** Share your personal statement draft with trusted colleagues, mentors, or advisors who can provide constructive feedback. Revise and refine your statement based on their suggestions, ensuring clarity, coherence, and compelling storytelling.
- **Review and Proofread:** Before submitting your personal statement, thoroughly review it for coherence, logical flow, and adherence to the application guidelines. Proofread for grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors. Ensure that your personal statement meets the required length and formatting specifications.

# Addressing Diversity & Inclusion in Your Personal Statement

Some fellowship applications require statements on how candidates contribute to advancing diversity and inclusion in academia. When addressing this type of prompt, share something genuinely personal about yourself. Highlight experiences or influences that have shaped your identity, values, and aspirations, and provide examples that illustrate your strength, drive, and resilience. This approach can demonstrate your understanding and appreciation of diversity and inclusion while showcasing your individual strengths and contributions. Consider the following strategies:

- **Reflect on Your Background:** Think about aspects of your personal and professional background that contribute to diversity and inclusion. This could include experiences related to gender, ethnicity, cultural background, socioeconomic status, disability (physical, mental, or cognitive), or other underrepresented identities. Discuss how these experiences have shaped your perspective and prepared you to contribute uniquely to the program or field.
- **Think Beyond Traditional Categories:** Think about diversity and inclusion beyond traditional categories of identity. Consider a broad definition that encompasses various aspects of individuality, such as unique life experiences, interdisciplinary interests, or unconventional career paths. These approaches can stand out to reviewers and demonstrate a nuanced understanding and commitment to diversity and inclusion.
- **Tailor Your Response:** Familiarize yourself with the specific goals and values of the fellowship program concerning diversity and inclusion. When responding to diversity-related prompts, align your answers with the program's objectives. Avoid generic or clichéd responses; instead, offer specific examples and anecdotes that demonstrate your understanding of diversity and your commitment to promoting inclusivity.
- **Share Personal Stories:** Connect with reviewers by sharing personal stories that illustrate your journey, challenges you've overcome, or individuals who have influenced you. Highlight instances where your background or experiences have informed your research, teaching, or community engagement. These narratives can help reviewers see the depth of your commitment to diversity and inclusion.
- **Emphasize Your Impact:** Explain how your work has positively impacted underrepresented communities or how it has the potential to do so in the future. Highlight projects, collaborations, or initiatives you have led or contributed to that promote diversity and inclusion. Share how your diverse experiences and perspectives can enhance the fellowship program and contribute to the broader academic community or your specific field of study.
- **Remain Authentic:** While addressing diversity and inclusion is essential, it is crucial to be genuine and avoid tokenism. Be sincere in your responses and avoid exaggeration or overemphasis. Reviewers value authenticity and seek applicants who demonstrate a true commitment to diversity and inclusion.
- **Be Mindful of Recommendation Letters:** If possible, request recommendation letters from individuals who can attest to your commitment to diversity and supporting underrepresented groups. Ensure that these letters align with your personal statement and provide additional evidence of your dedication.