

~ Personal Statement (Essay) Guide Sheet ~

Here's what the reviewers will need to learn (or infer) about you in these 2 pages:

- ✓ How motivated you are to pursue graduate studies/become a researcher.
- ✓ How you have demonstrated your potential as a leader *and* a team member.
- ✓ Your intelligence, insight, candor, creativity, and ability to communicate.
- ✓ Extraordinary efforts that you have made to enhance your knowledge and skills.
- ✓ Transferable skills & qualities you possess that will make you an exemplary professional.
- ✓ Your career aspirations and/or long range goals as a researcher.
- ✓ How you have applied your knowledge and skills to help others, support diversity, share scientific knowledge and/or benefit society.

A Suggested Outline for the GRFP Personal Statement

I. Introductory Paragraph: In three to five sentences, make an interesting point about you, your research interests or your vision. Your writing must convince the reader that you are intelligent, innovative, articulate, and dedicated--uniquely qualified to receive this fellowship. Avoid clichés and the mundane.

II. Next Section: Describe any personal, professional, or educational experiences or situations that have prepared you and contributed to your desire to pursue advanced study in your field.

II. Next Section: Describe your competencies, team/interdisciplinary skills, and evidence of leadership potential. Use tangible examples of your work in research settings, if possible.

IV. Next Section: Discuss your career aspirations and how the NSF fellowship will enable you to achieve your goals.

V. Next Section: Address [Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts](#) criteria.

VI. Concluding Paragraph: In three to five sentences, draw an interesting conclusion. Reflect on what you have learned, what your research means, or where you are headed. Bring closure to your essay.

TIP: The judicious use of **bold face** attracts the reviewers' eyes to key points. One strategy is to use paragraph subheadings such as "Goals." Another strategy is to use bold face for words like "encourage diversity" and "benefit society" to highlight your broader impacts. This helps assure that the reviewer does not overlook your efforts!

10-Step Strategy for Writing this Essay

Step 1. Go to [NSF-GRFP Fastlane](#) page. Carefully review this year's [program announcement](#) instructions. Study the two judging criteria, "intellectual merit" and "broader impacts." Register and login to [Fastlane](#). Go to the section to **find specific instructions on the personal statement** (essay). Note: The specific essay instructions are found only AFTER you login. Copy the essays instructions and save them. You will want to study the instructions, make a few notes and reflect on your ideas and experiences.

Step 2. Begin writing a first draft. Start with an engaging introductory paragraph. Set the tone or "theme" of your essay. Your goal is to convince the reviewers to continue reading your essay.

Step 3. Initially, develop just one or two paragraphs per required section. Use poignant examples to illustrate your ideas.

Step 4. Create transitions between paragraphs for reading "flow."

Step 5. Your final paragraph should tie the sections together, but avoid summarizing what you have written.

- Step 6.** Now go back and re-read each section. As space permits, add richness and details. Make logical breaks in lengthy paragraphs.
- Step 7.** Ask a friend, family member, study partner, or writing tutor to read your work for clarity and conviction. Did he or she find that your writing is compelling? Ask how you can improve it!
- Step 8.** Set your essay aside for several days. Reflect on your writing again. Will a stranger who reads it come to know the “real” you? Have you demonstrated your intellectual abilities (merit)? Your leadership potential to contribute to your profession? Will readers be convinced that you can have a broad impact on society? How does your essay set you apart from other highly-qualified fellowship applicants?
- Step 9.** Re-read and edit your entire essay. Make sure that your writing is succinct and intelligent, but lively!
- Step 10.** Make certain that you avoid repetition across the three GRFP essays, but that your tone and content is complementary.

Be subtle, but also weave in: Personal characteristics that will lead to your success (e.g. motivation, self-direction, dependability, persistence, communications, leadership, team player). Don’t make claims or assertions - use examples! This essay establishes the overall impression you want to create with reviewers.

Writer’s Block?

Here’s a few potential topics to illustrate your “Intellectual Merit” and “Broader Impacts:”

- Reflect on key experiences (negative & positive) that shaped your career/research interests.
 - Don’t dwell on failures or negative experiences; *but* certainly use them to illustrate how you’ve changed, persevered, or overcome odds.
 - Who are you mentors? Whose work do you follow? Why is this work important?
 - How long have you been intrinsically motivated to conduct self study or your own research?
 - What are your standards, values, and/or commitment to ethical research practices?
 - What pressing research problems, social needs, or international issues capture your attention? Why?
 - Leadership: How have you helped others? Did you work with someone or a group to address a problem?
 - What are your “lessons learned” from working with your mentor? From internships? Group projects?
 - Share your goals and/or vision for the future. What do you want to accomplish? How do you intend to contribute to your profession?
 - How has volunteering or service learning changed your thinking or goals?
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IMPORTANT: NSF’s Page Formatting Requirements

“Applicants must follow the instructions in the user guide and applicant module for completing each section of the application. The essays must be written using standard 8.5" x 11" page size, 12-point, Times New Roman font, 1" margins, and must be single spaced or greater. The Personal Statement, Previous Research Experience, and Proposed Graduate Study essays each have a maximum length of two pages, including all references, citations, charts, figures, and images. The Optional Program Eligibility essay is limited to one page. Failure to comply fully with these requirements could eliminate the application from consideration by review panels. Additionally, applications that are incomplete (missing required transcripts and/or reference letters, or that do not have "submitted" status by the application deadline) are ineligible for panel review. Applicants are advised to submit applications early to avoid possible FastLane system delays on the deadline dates.”

Source: 2010 NSF GRFP Announcement

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