

Writing the Fulbright *Personal Statement*

The Fulbright *Personal Statement* is designed with three main goals in mind. First, it shows that you are a three-dimensional person who is interesting, globally minded, and committed to the cross-cultural exchange that a year of research, study or teaching English entails. Second, it shows the personal side of what interests you in the project you are applying for. Finally, it shows what you want to give back to your hosts, not just what you want to get from your year overseas, at a personal level.

Ideally the writing in the *Personal Statement* intertwines with the *Statement of Grant Purpose*. The two essays should complement one another without being repetitive; the *Statement of Grant Purpose* should show what you want to do and how you are qualified to do it. The *Personal Statement* should show your motivations at a personal level.

Here is what the Fulbright *Personal Statement* is not about:

A repetition of your résumé: While some major points of your résumé are fine to put in (where you grew up, where you attended university, what your major was), no one wants to read a blow-by-blow description of your professional and extracurricular activities in narrative form. Tell us something we cannot find elsewhere in your on-line application.

A discussion of your qualifications: It is great that you were a Spanish major, that you enjoy working with children, and that you studied abroad in Bolivia. Unless you plan to talk about what motivated you to choose Spanish as a major, or Bolivia as a study abroad site, then leave it out or put it in your *Statement of Grant Purpose*.

A time to talk about random abstract concepts: Personal statements are not supposed to be about the importance of cross-cultural communication, teaching English as a foreign language, or the role of the United States in the 21st century. It is about you. If what you write does not link an abstract concept directly with you, leave it out.

A space to write random information about your host country: Finland has a fascinating language with fifteen cases that take the place of prepositions. Russia has a long history of leaning toward the West and isolating itself from external influences. Estonians are famous for loving their natural resources. All of these tidbits are interesting facts. They are also completely irrelevant to a *Personal Statement*, unless you are studying Finno-Ugric linguistics, Russian history, or Estonian forestry management.

Here is what the Fulbright *Personal Statement* is about:

You*: Seriously, it is about you, your interest in your topic, your motivations to research this project or teach English, your upbringing, your university experience, or whatever. You need to write at a personal level about what makes you want to take part in this teaching, study or research experience in your host country in an interesting, honest, non-hokey way. So, in this case, it really is all about you.

* But not so much about you that you write an endless string of first-person pronouns. You are interesting, but not **that** interesting that you need to use *I*, *me*, *my* and *mine* every third word.