4 Tips to Writing your GRFP Personal Statement

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GRFP offers support to recipients who will lead innovative research and teaching

“economic well-being of society”

“society at large”

“nation’s technological infrastructure”

“national security”
The fellowship application is judged on two criteria:

1) Intellectual Merit & 2) Broad Impact

potential to advance knowledge

potential to benefit society and contribute to specific desired societal outcomes
Please outline your educational and professional development plans and career goals. How do you envision graduate school preparing you for a career that allows you to contribute to expanding scientific understanding as well as broadly benefit society? Page limit - 3 pages

Describe your personal, educational and/or professional experiences that motivate your decision to pursue advanced study in science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM). Include specific examples of any research and/or professional activities in which you have participated. Present a concise description of the activities, highlight the results and discuss how these activities have prepared you to seek a graduate degree. Specify your role in the activity including the extent to which you worked independently and/or as part of a team. Describe the contributions of your activity to advancing knowledge in STEM fields as well as the potential for broader societal impacts.

NSF Fellows are expected to become globally engaged knowledge experts and leaders who can contribute significantly to research, education, and innovations in science and engineering. The purpose of this statement is to demonstrate your potential to satisfy this requirement. Your ideas and examples do not have to be confined necessarily to the discipline that you have chosen to pursue.
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How does your past, present and future show your:

1) Intellectual Merit & 2) Broad Impact

- potential to advance knowledge
- potential to benefit society and contribute to specific desired societal outcomes

And/or your potential for these things
4 tips to writing your GRFP personal statement
Example 1:
I am an ideal candidate for this fellowship program. I am curious, driven, and passionate about geology. I possess the intellectual merit and commitment to broad impact that this program requires.
Use details to **show**, not tell

- **Telling:**
  The house looked run-down.

- **Showing:**
  The flowers in the front garden were long dead, the grass was knee-high and paint was flaking from the window frames.
Examine for Showing; not Telling

Example 2:
That summer I worked as a field assistant in the western Himalaya under Prof. Oliver Jagoutz and his student Ben Klein, with funding from the MIT-India program. We surveyed the Khardung volcanics for sample sites for a paleomagnetic study. We took cores from three sites [1]. The results have now been used to constrain the rate of the Indo-Asian collision [2]. My notebook from that trip is full of lines like “Why are the granite slopes so steep here?” or, “How do streambeds form in these mountains of colluvium?”.
What’s the subtext he/she is “showing”? Do you want to work with this person?

Example 3:
My junior summer I took a fluid-dynamics focused internship at Shell’s Technology Center in Bangalore. The summer had a difficult start. Visa problems forced me to fly back to the US after only three days in India. To prepare for my project while waiting for paperwork, I learned C#.
1. Show; don’t tell
Example 4:
Over my first two years at MIT, I worked in an astrophysics lab. There, I calibrated a prototype x-ray polarimeter and successfully tripled the machine’s throughput. During my sophomore year at MIT I switched my major from Physics to Geology. My first geoscience research project began immediately afterwards, in January 2013. Under Prof. Leigh Royden. I built a 3D model to predict the flow of material under the Tibetan Plateau. We estimated that modern topography could only be formed if the lower-crustal viscosity was less than 1017Pa · s.
2. For each (important) experience, elaborate on how you got there and what was gained.

“Geeky autobiography of your brain”
2. For each (important) experience, elaborate on how you got there and what was gained.
Example 5

Earth Science crossed my intellectual horizons in my second year at MIT. I was then majoring in Physics and working in an astrophysics lab, where I calibrated a prototype x-ray polarimeter. I enjoyed working with optics, and successfully tripled the machine’s throughput, but I had started to lead hikes with the MIT Outing Club and wanted to learn what was under my feet. I took Introductory Geology and have been captivated by geoscience ever since.

My first geoscience research project began immediately afterwards, in January 2013. Under Prof. Leigh Royden. I built a 3D model to predict the flow of material under the Tibetan Plateau. We estimated that modern topography could only be formed if the lower-crustal viscosity was less than $10^{17}$ Pa · s. This project introduced me to fluid dynamics simulations and to Matlab.
1. Show; don’t tell

2. How you got there; what was gained
3. Be Future Focused

“How do you envision graduate school preparing you for a career that allows you to contribute to expanding scientific understanding as well as broadly benefit society?”
How do you envision **graduate school** preparing you for a **career** that allows you to contribute to expanding **scientific understanding** as well as broadly benefit **society**?
4. Who are you as a person?

"Introduce the reader to the real human being who has accomplished all the other things in your application."
Let’s look at some winning examples
Our Agenda for Tackling the GRFP Essays

A. 4 Personal Statement Pitfalls
   1. Show; Don’t Tell
   2. Getting There; Gained
   3. Future Focus
   4. Show Personality

B. Make a GCC Appointment
Attend our peer review session

Tuesday, October 2\textsuperscript{nd} 4:30-6 IDeATe B
Global Communication Center

Free Communication Consulting
Expert feedback to improve your papers & presentations

Carnegie Mellon University
Global Communication Center
The GCC provides free consulting on any communication project

Written

Visual

Verbal

Journal articles - class essays - conference presentations - PowerPoint slides - resumes - cover letters - personal statements - research papers - data visualization - technical/lab reports - group projects - grant proposals - dissertations
Spend your 50-minute appointment brainstorming, writing, revising, or rehearsing.
The GCC is on the 1st floor of Hunt Library

Hours
Monday-Thursday 10am-8pm
Friday 10am-4pm
Sunday 4pm-8pm
Let us be your second set of eyes

Email
gcc-cmu@andrew.cmu.edu

Website
www.cmu.edu/gcc