4 Tips to Writing your GRFP Personal Statement
GRFP offers support (money, prestige, research opportunities) to recipients who will lead innovative research and teaching.
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.
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
Both statements need to show:
1) Intellectual Merit and 2) Broad Impact

Personal Statement
3 pages

Research Plan
2 pages
4 tips to writing your GRFP personal statement
Personal Statement – “Personal, relevant background, and future goals statement”

Personal Statement

Research Statement

3 pages

2 pages
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.
Show; Don’t 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”?

I would find it difficult to name any aspect of my undergraduate life that wasn’t affected by my interest in the brain. With this newfound passion, I began to look for research opportunities that would allow me to further investigate this amazing organ’s inner workings. I failed to secure a lab position during the first semester of my sophomore year due to my lack of research experience. However, I persisted as the idea of doing original research enthralled me. These efforts thankfully bore fruit when I was accepted into Richard Ivry's Cognition and Action lab. The invitation into his research group reflected his interest in mentoring underrepresented minorities in science, and I was happy to have some guidance in the academic world because this was unexplored territory for me as a first-generation immigrant. Richard's support became the foundation for my motivation to pursue a Ph.D.
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 $10^{17}$ Pa · s.
SOP

Proposal to Implement a Sustainable Energy Solution

Jonathan Doe
5000 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
(123) 456-7890
john.doe@gmail.com

January 20, 2014

Renewable Power, Inc.
100 Matthew Road #700
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Dear Hiring Manager,

I am very interested in the position of Sales Representative in Pittsburgh, PA, as advertised on ZipRecruiter. My B.A. in Environmental Studies, with a concentration in Sustainability, from the University of Kansas aligned well with my interest in renewable energy, sustainable practices, and climate advocacy. I believe my educational background in sustainability, coupled with my experience in direct marketing and sales, make me a strong candidate for this position.

My marketing skills were developed throughout my career in sales and sales management. My previous experience and results show that I am well-suited for this role. I am familiar with product marketing, and have a strong understanding of the competitive landscape. I am a strong communicator and have a proven track record of success in direct sales.

In addition to my personal affinity for sales, I am more than eager to be a part of the burgeoning green power revolution. I am motivated to lead a team of enthusiastic representatives with the mission of promoting clean energy into a rapidly growing market.

My passion for developing renewable energy sources also aligns with my interest in a long-term career opportunity with an ethical company like Renewable Power.

Thank you very much for considering my application for the position. I am confident that you will find me to be a valuable asset to your company. Please feel free to contact me at john.doe@gmail.com or (123) 456-7890.

Best Regards,

Jonathan Doe

Resume

John Doe

Objective: Seeking a position at an innovative company

Education:

University of Minnesota

College of Science & Engineering

B.S. in Environmental Science

Major: Environmental Science

Work Experience:

American Eagle

Sales Associate

July 2009 - Present

- Collaborated with the team on the development of new product lines
- Developed strong customer relationships

Target

Sales Representative

May 2008 - Present

- Managed a small team of sales associates
- Met or exceeded sales goals

Volunteer Experience:

Greenpeace

Environmental Advocate

June 2006 - Present

- Developed and implemented educational programs
- Worked with local communities

References:

Available upon request.
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.
Examine for getting 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. 3 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

October 5\textsuperscript{th} 5-6 IDEATE B
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
GCC consultants are trained to work with grad and undergrad students in STEM and the humanities

... and many more!
The GCC is on the 1st floor of Hunt Library

Hours
Monday-Thursday 11am-8pm
Sunday 5pm-8pm
Check availability and schedule your appointment at cmu.edu/gcc

Get on our waitlist if the slot you want is unavailable

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White slots = available
Here is an overview of a typical appointment

1. You make an appointment
2. You upload your documents, instructor prompts, and model document
3. Tutor prepares for session
4. **Session: 50 minutes**
5. You and tutor write up a revision plan

2 hours in advance
WORKSHOPS

Improving the Flow of Your Writing

Communicating Data to Non-Experts

Team Communication: The Fundamentals of Managing Team Projects

Making the Case for your Research

Writing a Related Works Section

Full workshop lineup at cmu.edu/gcc
Hear What People Are Saying about the GCC

"My GCC session was very productive and insightful. Communicating my ideas to a tutor helped me to better understand the assignment and how to tackle it."
- Undergraduate Student in ECE

"I was totally satisfied with my GCC session. My tutor was very helpful with both the content and language of the cover letter."
- Graduate Student in Computational Biology

"My tutor gave me great feedback about the organization of my presentation and really helped me understand where my audience would struggle with my talk."
- Graduate Student in English

"My tutor helped me turn pages of raw information into an actual, coherent paper."
- Undergraduate Student in Cognitive Science

"My tutor was wonderful not only just for grammar but the overall quality of the writing."
- Graduate Student in Architecture

“...the type of personal attention you need that can sometimes be forgotten in college.”
- Undergraduate Student in the School of Design
Let us be your second set of eyes

Email
gcc-cmu@andrew.cmu.edu

Website
www.cmu.edu/gcc