



The Personal Statement

In writing a personal statement, **you must answer the specific prompt provided by the fellowship program.** That said, all personal statements share some common features. Generally defined, a personal statement is an *intellectual autobiography* that *explains your motivations* and *connects them to your goals*. It tells a story about your past actions and what inspired them, and it points to your future. In some sense, you can think about it as you would think about applying for a job: you want the job, and you use your past training and skills to land it.

1. Telling a Story about Yourself: As an intellectual autobiography, the personal statement tells your story. Depending on the opportunity, it will be either scholarly or professional. It should present the best possible picture of yourself by highlighting your unique attributes through your skills and experience, leadership potential, knowledge, service, the challenges you overcame, and/or your personal development. It is not a list of these things or a rehashing of your CV. Rather, it describes *key background* that has prepared you for the opportunity and made you the perfect fit.

2. Your Motivations and Inspirations: As it tells your story, the personal statement explains your motivations and inspirations. It clues readers in on what drove you to pursue your passion, and for what purpose. Many selection committees also want to know your rationale for applying to their specific program. The strongest personal statements are able to connect past experiences and past motivation with the present motivation of applying. By discussing these things, it tells the personal story that the CV cannot.

3. Projecting into the Future: Finally, the personal statement addresses the question of how the opportunity will help you achieve your short-term and long-term your goals. Think of the scholarship as a stepping stone getting you somewhere. How will you continue to benefit from it after the experience is over? The future is always hypothetical, but the committee will want to know that you have a *plan*, and that the plan is logical and feasible.

To sum up, the personal statement is a story about your past that connects the dots with your present and future. It describes what led you to this moment, where you are now (current interests, activities, accomplishments), and where you will go after the scholarship.

Tips for Getting Started:

Try writing a paragraph or two on each of the following questions:

1. What subject are you most passionate about? How did this passion come about?
2. Why did you pursue this passion? What were the milestones and turning points?
3. How do you see the fellowship taking you to the next level, academically, professionally, and personally?

As you write, keep your tone lively, not flat. Avoid vague or generic statements that any intelligent college student could make. Be direct and persuasive, and steer clear of “subtleties” your readers might miss. Finally, let your personality shine!