

Writing Fulbright Application Statements: Advice and Resources

UW-Madison FUSP Application Workshop: August 4, 2025

1. General Suggestions for ALL the Fulbright statements:

- Avoid generalizations that could appear in anyone's application (e.g., "My project has the potential to make an important contribution to the field of X"); instead, **demonstrate** your points through examples and analysis.
- Convey knowledge, dedication, interest, and intellectual passion.
- Support general statements with specifics. Rich details that are specific to you and your project and background will make your essays convincing and memorable.
- Don't exaggerate. Be scrupulously honest about details.
- Be prepared to write many drafts and to do a lot of revision.
- Have your adviser and others who know about your field critique your draft. Have readers outside your field offer advice. Visit the Writing Center.
- Proofread carefully. Your statements should be error-free!

2. The Statement of Grant Purpose

Think of your Fulbright essay as a story in which you explain the significance of your proposed research to an audience of smart and interested readers. By the end of the story, your readers should be convinced of three things: that your project is interesting, that it has the potential to expand our understanding of a particular field or question, and that you are the person to do it. —Professor John Duffy, University of Notre Dame

Research/Study/Art applicants: Your statement should clearly describe and justify your proposed project and explain why it needs to be done in the particular country.

- Try to include a single sentence that sums up your main point or purpose.
- Make your project clear to readers outside of your field.
- Articulate a clear, specific plan of research. (For a program of study at a particular university, indicate why you chose that university and give specifics of the program you plan to follow. If you can, specify the particular individuals you plan to work with there.)
- Show that your project is worthwhile and that it fills a gap in current knowledge.
- Explain the multiplier effect of your project. If possible, link your project to an issue of broader social/political import.

- Explain why you must carry out your program of study or research in the host country you have chosen and demonstrate knowledge of that country.
- Provide specific evidence that your project is feasible. Be sure to demonstrate that (a) you have the academic training (including language proficiency) to complete your project; (b) your project can be carried out in one academic year; (c) the resources needed to carry out your proposed research or study program will be available in the host country; and (d) you have established contacts in (or related to) the host country.

Getting Started on Your Statement of Grant Purpose (Proposed Research/Study/Arts)

First, write brief answers to the following questions:

- Did a particular experience or series of experiences lead me to the focus of my proposed research, study, or teaching?
- What is my project? What is/are the main question(s) I am trying to answer? Why is this project important?
- What background information will my readers (who are not all experts in my field) need in order to understand what I am proposing?
- Why is it necessary to conduct this project in the host country I have chosen?
- What contacts do I have or can I make in (or related to) the host country?
- What is my plan for carrying out this project?

Next, think about developing and organizing the material above in the most efficient way to make your project engaging, clear, and convincing to a reader who is not an expert in your field.

- If you have a relevant brief incident, story, image, or metaphor, try using it to provide an effective and memorable opening. You may find that you can allude to it at one or two other key points to help unify your statement.
- The Statement of Grant Purpose is a fairly functional piece of writing with fixed topics that need to be covered. A straightforward presentation of material starting with the second question above is one option that has worked well in many successful Fulbright proposals.
- If you are writing a proposal for research, do **not** simply condense your thesis or dissertation proposal and add the “host country” material. Write a new version for the Fulbright application that makes your project engaging and understandable to interdisciplinary readers.
- If you are writing a proposal for graduate study, the focus should not be solely on why you are excited about pursuing an advanced degree. You need to make clear why the program you are applying to stands out as **the** option for you, that you are (or will be) prepared to do the work asked of you but also be developing additional skills and

advancing training that wouldn't otherwise be available to you.

Addressing Your Interdisciplinary Audience

- State what your project is (in general, without a lot of technical language) by the end of the first paragraph.
- Show that you are aware of the scholarly conversation about your issue and explain a key debate or question within your field.
- Read some of the past successful proposals by emailing the UW-Madison Fulbright Coordinator at uwfulbright@wisc.edu.

English Teaching Assistantship (ETA) Grants

Be sure to read the country description and the teaching description carefully (the nature of the ETAs varies from country to country within the program).

- Reflect on the classroom and geographic placement options available in the country that you are applying to. What experiences, skills, and familiarity do you have with each? Have you worked with one set of learners and developed teaching strategies and/or curriculum that is adaptable to other learners? How would you do that?
- Are there core skills that you have developed outside of a teaching environment that are useful and adaptable to a classroom setting? Have you taken on leadership roles with student groups? Managerial roles in a work setting?
- Reflect on your own learning experiences – including language learning experiences. What has proven most compelling? Where have you had success? Where have you felt most challenged?
- Consider sharing your statement and plans with language instructors for their feedback. Are your plans for classroom engagement age appropriate? Are their particular challenges facing a language learning classroom that is “apart” from the dominant culture that your presence might help redress?
- Understand the nature of the placement, how much is devoted to language instruction and how much to other cultural context provision. Also, make sure you understand the nature of your role in the classroom: will you have your own class, be an assistant to a lead teacher, a floating resource teacher? Make sure that you are highlighting the skills and training that allows you to fulfill the designated roles **and** have the flexibility and wherewithal to adapt and contribute as needed.

Many countries offer the option of adding or sometimes require a “supplemental project” – this could be a smaller research project, course of study, volunteer activity, etc. Oftentimes, this is because you will not be teaching for a full 40 work week. Make sure to provide a realistic

project that is **not** dependent on a specific geographic placement. Also, remember that even when a supplemental project is required it will be a small piece of your work – the focus of your statement of grant purpose needs to be on the ETA-specific work.

3. Short Answers: Fulfilling the Fulbright Mission

The answers to these questions should give the Fulbright committees a picture of you as an individual, with a focus on the aspects of your personality and experience that have led you to seek this particular study or research experience abroad and the confidence to feel prepared to spend a year abroad completing it.

- Detail influences that have been significant in leading you to the point where you are now in your research/study.
- Give concrete examples, where relevant, of life experiences that have prepared you for the Fulbright experience.
- Provide evidence that you can adapt to a different cultural environment and positively represent the US abroad.
- Indicate how the Fulbright experience will relate to your career plans and life goals.

Getting Started on Your Short Answers

First, write brief responses to the following questions:

- Think about your academic and life experiences. What are some of the most important experiences and traits that have prepared me to be a successful Fulbright scholar?
- What in your personal experiences have been most important in influencing who I am, especially in relation to my Fulbright project?
- Which personal qualities and/or experiences show my ability to adapt well to another culture?
- How is the Fulbright experience related to my plans for the future?

Then try one of the following approaches to focus and organize content for your answers.

Top-Down Approach

Are there several key ideas you know you want to express and that you might build your short answers around?

- **Begin** by writing down those ideas.
- Then list some ways in which your experiences, education, goals, and anticipated use of a Fulbright connect to the ideas (using your answers to the questions above as a guide).

Organize and develop the list further by following the instructions on the Fulbright website.

Bottom-Up Method

If you haven't thought of a unifying theme,

- Try listing material you might include in your short answers, using the questions above to get started.
- For any general items on your list, jot down specific details.
- Go over your list several times, asking whether some items overlap or belong together (if so, ask—what do they illustrate?).

By this point, you may see that some or all of the items suggest a unifying theme or two. But you may need to write one or more drafts before finding the threads that will hold your statement together.

4. Two Additional Tips

Addressing Your “Community Engagement”

From the Fulbright Application Materials:

How will you integrate within and engage with your host community? Consider the ways in which you engage with your U.S. community (through extracurricular activities, hobbies, or volunteering), and how you can engage with these ideas and practices while on grant. In what unique ways do you plan to share your culture and values in your host community and learn from others? How do your lived experiences prepare you to represent the United States as a cultural ambassador? Provide specific examples.

These directions might make it sound as if you will need to be flying the flag when not otherwise pursuing your Fulbright work. That's not really the case. The point here is to emphasize that you will not be sequestered in the library, lab, or classroom for the duration of your Fulbright stay – that you intend to get out and about in the local community. You can engage with your community through sports, arts, and more.

Consider how sharing your ideas for engaging with your community is an opportunity to share what you know about the community and share more about yourself as an individual. (Keep in mind the original intent of the Fulbright grants – international understanding and enrichment!)

“Abstract/Summary of Proposal”

Writing an abstract/summary is an excellent way of getting “into” your application, especially in terms of offering a launch point for tackling the statement of grant purpose. It should, however, be the last piece that you finalize. The abstract/summary appears on the first page of the application and will be the first thing written by you that review committees

read. It should offer not just an overview of your planned work but should be an introduction to your application as a whole and effectively “signpost” what you want your readers to be paying particular attention to as they read through your application from the opening pages to the statement of grant purpose.

5. Reading Sample Statements

Reading and analyzing sample statements is a great first step in considering how to approach writing your essays. We’ve provided some examples in this workshop and included these questions to consider as you analyze the choices the authors made:

- How does the statement start? Is there any opening story, a broad statement of their intention to get this Fulbright, or something else? Is the choice effective to you? Is it a choice you’d like to make?
- What is the balance of broad, general statements to specific, detailed statements?
- How much background information do they provide on their personal experiences and projects?
- How certain do they sound about their plans?

When looking at sample statements, you can see that there are a variety of ways of approaching organization and content. This analysis can help you decide what approaches would be best for sharing your story and plans.

Please note that the UW-Madison Fulbright Coordinator has samples of successful Fulbright statements. Contact Mark (see below) if you would like access to these.

6. Additional Resources

- **Mark Lilleleht, UW-Madison Fulbright Coordinator**

The main source of information on Fulbright requirements, including the statements. 256 Bascom Hall, uwfulbright@wisc.edu, 608-265-6070, <https://fulbright.wisc.edu/fusp/>

- **Your advisers and key faculty in your area**

Besides giving advice on your topic and proposal, they are often able to provide information about resources and contacts in the host country you have chosen.

- **Individual appointments at the UW-Madison Writing Center**

Highly trained writing instructors will give you individual feedback on your draft statements.

6171 Helen C White, wcenter@writing.wisc.edu, 608-263-1992, <https://writing.wisc.edu>

- **Webinars from Fulbright**

Upcoming: <https://us.fulbrightonline.org/applicants/information-sessions>

Recorded: <https://us.fulbrightonline.org/resources/recorded-webinars>