

WRITING A PERSONAL ESSAY FOR FELLOWSHIP APPLICATIONS

WRITING THE PROPOSAL AND PERSONAL ESSAY

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Regardless of which type of Fellowship a student is applying for, the selection process will be influenced by how well the student's ideas and qualifications are conveyed. For Fellowships requiring a project proposal, the application will need to articulate the objectives of the project, specifically outline the strategies to accomplish the objectives, and demonstrate the personal ability to carry out the project successfully. In choosing to become a candidate for any Fellowship, the student will want to carefully articulate his or her suitability for the Fellowship, even if this is done via a brief cover letter.

Some Fellowship applications ask specifically for a "personal statement" of some sort. Others ask applicants to write about their interests and qualifications more generally, and still others simply ask for a cover letter in addition to such materials as a transcript, resume, and list of recommendations.

Regardless of the form this material takes, the applicant's goal is to convince the funding entity that he or she possesses the personal attributes and skills that define a qualified candidate. A successful essay enables the funding entity to see the person behind the application – his or her passions and commitment. In a competitive selection process, a strong essay is very frequently the factor that tips the scales in an applicant's favor.

The focus of the essay or cover letter should be the applicant's previous experiences in public interest or any other prior work that would be relevant to the substantive mission of the Fellowship program. Students should think broadly about what they have done before law school, during the summers, or in a clinical setting. They should evaluate all of their strengths, from the more traditional legal skills they have honed to any volunteer work or community involvement that could be relevant. If students have not done any public interest work to speak of, they will need to explain why this work is meaningful to them and why they have now turned their career goals in this direction.

If a student has any personal connection to the Fellowship's targeted population, he or she should explain why and how the connection makes the Fellowship a particularly compelling prospect. In sum, as an administrator of the Skadden Fellowship Program puts it, selection committees are looking for people sensitive to the problems faced by the disadvantaged – people committed to the project proposed and to the Fellowship organization's goals – people who are not only passionate about their work but also able to articulate what they consider to be effective solutions.