

Writing Your Fulbright Application Essays

The best Fulbright essays require brainstorming, multiple drafts, and a process. If you can do these prewriting activities with a friend and other trusted readers, your essays will be much stronger in the end! Your two one-page essays should highlight different strengths. By the end of both essays, the reader should know the following: what you will do in-country, your teaching ability, your interest in and knowledge of the location, your community/cultural engagement project (unless prohibited), your ability to serve as a cultural ambassador, and why you are the perfect candidate, to do this exact job, in this specific location. Plan to complete these steps by August 1st.

Step One: Prewriting

Brainstorm Possible Content

1. Consider these possible questions while you brainstorm topics for your Fulbright essays. Do not begin writing yet.
 - What matters to you? Why?
 - You have selected where you want to go. Why? What will you do when you get there?
 - Describe a time when you were given a second chance. How did you meet this challenge?
 - Would your friends/family/professors describe you as diplomatic? How?
2. Choose two of the above questions and brainstorm for 15 minutes about possible ideas related to each one.
3. Then, look over your list and strike all ideas that are cliché, ideas you've written about before, things you think you are supposed to say, etc.
4. Which ideas make you feel energized and excited to write more? Circle these "live wires."

Focused Freewriting

1. Choose three of the ideas that you've circled. Spend thirty minutes freewriting about them (10 minutes for each topic).
2. Now, find the strongest parts of your freewriting samples. If you are with a partner, bracket what you think are the strongest parts of your samples and share them aloud. If you are not in person with a partner, ask a trusted reader to review your writing and tell you which parts of the writing sample stood out most.

Rough Draft

You are ready to attempt a longer essay. The essay can be a direct response to one of the original prompts, an idea that you discovered in your freewriting, or a combination. Pretend your writing samples are your notes for a 50-minute essay exam. Set a timer for 50 minutes and write the essay. If you are still feeling vague, go back to the prompts!

Note: At this point, think of yourself as having an audience, someone on the Fulbright committee who has read 30 other essays and is waiting for one that introduces them to a strong candidate in an intelligent and memorable ways.

Step Two: Preliminary Review

Now is a good time to share your work with as many other readers as possible. This is just a very rough draft, so it's perfectly fine for it to be just a beginning. What's important is having lots of options for directions you can go with your work, and the reviewer can help focus your good ideas. At this point in the process, no need to worry about perfect grammar and structure. Your reviewer(s) should do at least one of the following:

1. **Pointing/Center of Gravity.** Identify a "center of gravity," a specific place in a text, that seems especially important, interesting, or generative (this is not necessarily the thesis). The purpose is to identify potentially rich elements of the text that might be developed further.
2. **Believing and Doubting.** Highlight the aspects of the essay that you think are weakest. Now, what could you do to change your essay to strengthen that? What aspects are strongest? Now, what can you do to build on those? In other words, the reader should read as a skeptic and a cheerleader.

Change your draft based on this feedback. If you haven't yet sent your work to Dr. Burch, do it now!

Step Three: Planning the Draft Version for Campus Committee Review

Now that you've gotten some feedback, it's time to plan the draft you will send to the GC campus committee for evaluation. This draft may be a revision of your rough draft or a brand new version. Consider as you plan:

- What is the one thing you want the committee to take away from your essay? If only one idea comes across about you, what is it?
- How will you introduce that idea without getting bogged down in generalities? What is your hook?
- How will you build that impression? What examples, stories, or cultural commentary will you include?

Write an outline. Now, write the new version or revise the rough draft your essay. This is the most intensive part of the process. Check your essay for the following:

- a clear structure, including an interesting opening that draws the reader in and a compelling conclusion
- coherent logical development of examples and transitions
- clear, effective prose style (no awkward wording, wordiness)
- carefully edited for grammar and mechanics

Once you are satisfied with the essay(s), and it has these elements, you are ready to send it to the Campus Committee (no later than August 1st)!