

Writing a winning scholarship essay (Updated October 2023)

Do some research.

- **Read the scholarship application. What kind of essay(s) should be written?**
- Make a list of the study abroad program features (courses, housing, cultural activities, excursions, field trips). Why do you want to attend this program? What features interests you? What will be helpful or relevant to your current studies and to your future?
- Make a list about the city and region where your program will take place (places/monuments/museums, traditions, food, language, culture, etc.) Why do you want to go to (*program location*)? Learn about the place where you will be studying!
- Have you traveled to other countries? Where did you go? What did you do/see? Make a list of everything you loved about your trip. If you have never traveled, describe why leaving will be significant to your growth and what you want out of that.
- What has inspired you to study abroad? Be specific. Is your reason in the personal, academic or professional categories?

PERSONAL STATEMENT ESSAY: Focus on your trajectory- Take the reader on a journey of your life. Make a list with 3 categories. This will be your OUTLINE. Use bullet points but write full length, articulated thoughts: *“I graduated from Central High School in June 2020.”*

Personal- Who you were before? Tell your story. (Your *past* up to this moment)

Academic- Your academic journey (Your *present* – the reader is meeting you now as a student at “X” College/University.)

Professional- Where are you going? Bring your study abroad location into your journey... (*Future*)



Start by BRAINSTORMING the categories in the following order: (1.) Academic (2.) Professional (3.) Personal.

| ACADEMIC | PROFESSIONAL | PERSONAL |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HS, current college – be sure to mention you are a community college student • Year and major. Do you have a unique major? • Why did you choose this major? Make us care. • Are you a first-generation college student? Are you a “non-traditional” student? • Do you speak a foreign language? • Have you had issues or obstacles in your education? • How will study abroad help you with your GE/major course work? How can it help you transfer? • Is there a course offered on the program that you’re interested in especially or that will benefit you/your major? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your dream job? Why is this your dream job? • How would study abroad/international experience be helpful/needed? • Do you want to help people? Who? How? • Where do you want to work? Internationally? (Research some jobs/organizations.) • What experiences, studies, degrees are needed for this job? • What skills/qualities are needed for be a good (<i>insert your dream profession</i>)? • Will skills needed for your dream job can be gained in the study abroad experience? • What skills will be challenged in the study abroad experience? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your age? • Where are you from? Where were you born? • What is your ethnicity? • Describe any other important information that could help the reader understand you better (gender, sexual orientation, immigrant, veteran, differently abled, low income, etc.) • What were you like younger? in high school? • Family relationships- parents, siblings, important extended family • What was it like growing up in your family? In your city? • What’s the hardest thing you have ever had to go through? What made it hard? What were you and/or your family like before? How are you |

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| <p>Email the faculty for more info if needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the program site benefit you/your major? • What kinds of skills and qualities does a person with your major need to have? • What is your transfer plan or dream? School, major, degree (Do some research.) • Do you want a graduate degree? In what? Where? (Do some research.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be specific on how a professional (in your dream job) would need/use these skills. | <p>different as a result? Describe how it made/makes you feel.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe any other incidents/issues in the same manner as above. • Do you have a personal connection to the study abroad location? • What is in this city that is unique and you can't find anywhere else? (specific museum, custom, grad school, etc.) • Will you be staying in a homestay or an apartment? Is your living situation a significant reason why you are choosing to study abroad (<i>need to become more independent, I want to learn how to live with strangers before I transfer, I can practice the foreign language I want to learn with my host family, etc.</i>) • How will study abroad help you grow personally? • Are there any specific life skills/character traits study abroad can help you either acquire or grow out of? |
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Write the Personal Statement essay.

- A good, thorough outline makes an excellent essay. Go back through the essay and circle all the best lines. Does a **theme** jump out at you? If you can find a theme in your work then definitely build off that. Having a clear theme really helps the reader out in terms of comprehending your argument and making you memorable. Themes can include giving back, becoming a global citizen, independence and freedom, taking risks, overcoming hardship, etc.
- A. Start with the personal column. Write a paragraph summarizing your personal journey. **For a Study Abroad scholarship, make sure you add in elements of the program/location that will help you in your personal growth. (Use your research.)**
 - B. Now write a paragraph on your academic journey. **For a Study Abroad scholarship, make sure that you add in elements of the program/location that will help you in your academic future. (Use your research.)**
 - C. Write the professional journey. **For a Study Abroad scholarship, make sure you add in elements of the program/location that will help you in your professional future. (Use your research.)**
- Do you need a short introduction or conclusion?
 - Re-read the essay. Fix any grammar or spelling errors. Can you edit any sentences and make it shorter, more to the point?
 - Take the essay to the Writing Center on campus or a professor willing to look it over and give you advice.

- Readers have 3-5 minutes per essay to read and decide if the essay passes. Was your essay organized? Was it easy to read? Did it answer any specific questions asked by the scholarship prompt? **Did it make the reader feel something for you**?
- Finally, **MAKE SURE YOU WERE SPECIFIC**. Students often believe they are answering the question when in reality their answers are extremely vague, ambiguous, or even incomplete. If you find you weren't particular, go back and edit. The details matter and show that you are seriously thinking about this study abroad program.

Vague sentence: I want to study abroad in London because I love history and want to take in all of the great art and culture.

What kind of history do you love? Why do you love it? Culture is vague – do you want to experience a new country's cuisine, understand their political system or a culture's relationship to art, etc.? How exactly will you learn about these things?

Specific sentence: As an art history major, I plan to go to London and visit the British Museum. In the future I want to work with art from ancient empires, so visiting this museum and experiencing the world's largest collection of Egyptian artifacts up close will provide me important exposure to the field.

For Gilman Scholarship and Study Abroad scholarships, make sure these questions are answered:

- Do you make a connection between your program and goals?
- Do you make a connection between your country and your goals?
- Do you share how you will be academically successful on your program?
- Do you give examples of your experiences, skills, and knowledge that you will use to meet program challenges?
- Do you address how this abroad experience will impact your future?

GILMAN SCHOLARSHIP SPECIFIC ESSAY: BUILDING MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING ESSAY

Gilman is a prestigious scholarship and Gilman Scholars are expected to be good ambassadors of the US during their time abroad, representing the best of American youth and reflecting a diversity of values and beliefs. Gilman Scholars are expected to contribute to the goal of building mutual understanding between the host country and the US.

Paragraph I: What does being an American mean to you? Can you summarize your American story? How will you represent your culture and your country while abroad? What is being a good US citizen representative while abroad? What is *mutual understanding*?

Paragraph II: Be specific. How will you become culturally engaged? How will you look for these opportunities? What aspects of the study abroad program will facilitate that? What kinds of things will you/can you do to actively engage in the host culture and with local citizens? How will you contribute to the goal of *building mutual understanding*?

Paragraph III: Describe the intended impact. How will this experience impact you and the host culture? How do you hope to bring back aspects of the local culture and community to the US post-study abroad?

GILMAN SCHOLARSHIP SPECIFIC ESSAY: FOLLOW ON SERVICE PROJECT PROPOSAL

Gilman aims to increase the amount of students studying abroad in your community or at your campus.

1. Answer the following questions:

- Identify your project. What are your skills? What are your connections/resources?
- Who will you collaborate with? On campus? In your community? Who is your target population on campus or in your community? Do you have data about the target population? Do they study abroad?

- What resources will you need?
- What impact do you want to make? Be realistic. Is there a timeline for this goal?

Make sure to include these questions in your essay:

- Does your FOSP increase awareness of the Gilman Scholarship and study abroad?
- Is your project feasible?
- Do you give a detailed plan for your project?
- Do you include your study abroad experience into your project?
- Do you have an intended audience? Who will you collaborate with to reach this community?

2. Write the essay:

Paragraph I: Write about study abroad on your campus. Statistics, facts, situation. Lack of information? Opportunities?

What is needed to improve SA on your campus? Identify and introduce your project idea.

Paragraph II: Explain your project. Answer the questions above. Use specific activities, materials, etc. **How** will you execute your idea?

Paragraph III: Describe the intended impact. How will this help promote study abroad to your target population? **Why** is your project important and needed? How will you measure the impact?

3. Go back to your Personal Statement and add in a sentence or two about your project in the Academic section. If you have a clear theme from your PS to work off of, this could be a great Segway to your Project Proposal.

Example: If you wrote about becoming a social worker in your future and how studying abroad will help you accomplish that goal in your Personal Statement, maybe your project can collaborate with the REACH program on campus to help foster students travel.