

Graduate Fulbright Program Application Tips and FAQ

Revised 7/18/25

The website for all Fulbright competitions is <https://us.fulbrightonline.org>. The electronic application and official instructions are found on that site. If you haven't been on this site, and you are intending to apply for a Fulbright, drop everything (including this document) and go there now. It is the authority on application requirements, and it is chock full of helpful information.

Please refer to the [Fulbright Program page](#) on the LGS website for current internal Emory/LGS Fulbright requirements and deadlines.

Application Tips

1. Go to the on-line application immediately and become familiar with it. While the on-line application is very user friendly, you may be frustrated by the technology if you wait until the last minute to use it. Know the application's quirks and limitations long before you must submit your proposal. The on-line application allows you to make entries, save your work, and return to edit.
2. Alert your letter writers now! Remember that faculty who are writing your letters are also writing letters for other students and are juggling a great many professional obligations. Let them know in advance what grants you are applying for and what your deadlines are. **All letters of recommendation must be submitted via the Fulbright online portal by the first internal deadline, September 1.**
3. One function of a letter of support is to establish the feasibility and intellectual interest of your project. It is therefore very important for the letter writer to be familiar with the details of your project. Provide your letter writer with a copy of the research proposal and the personal statement.
4. **Language evaluations** are required for any language that you will use in your research and or in your daily activities in the country of research.
5. You will need one official copy of your Emory transcript, one official transcript from each post- secondary school you have attended. If not already available electronically, these will need to be scanned and uploaded to the application.
6. Do not trust the mechanical grammar and spell checks of your software to find errors of spelling, punctuation, or word usage. Proofread the entire application. Have a friend or associate proofread the entire application. Then check it again.

Application FAQ

The [Fulbright Application Components](#) webpage includes a high level of detail on requirements and documents and is the ultimate authority on applications. Fulbright does not grant exceptions or extensions, so these guidelines must be followed *exactly*. Official Fulbright guidelines may change based on federal priorities and supersede any advice or information we provide in this FAQ.

Do I really need an affiliation?

According to the [Fulbright guidelines](#), study/research applicants must have an affiliation with an educational institution or other sponsoring entity in the host country, even if the grant project is primarily research, an artistic activity, or does not require enrollment in regular classes. Note that some countries have specific requirements (e.g. some countries require an academic institution, others prohibit NGO affiliations, etc.). Check the country page on the Fulbright web page for details.

Why do I need an affiliation?

Fulbright is not just about research. Fulbright is looking for academic ambassadors, and your affiliation is one avenue through which you can contribute to the host country.

What form should the letter of affiliation take?

IIE prefers letters of affiliation to be written on letterhead. The document may be emailed to you, but a plain email is not acceptable. You must provide a translation of the letter if it is not in English. If you receive it by mail, you will scan and upload the letter.

What if my letter of reference or language evaluation comes in after the campus deadline?

If all materials are not turned in by the internal Emory/LGS deadline, you will likely be required to apply at large. We will try to be flexible, but the Laney Graduate School Fulbright Committee will need time to review everything that will go in the final submission.

Who should do my language evaluation?

IIE prefers that the evaluation be done by a faculty member of some educational institution.

I will be using one language for research, but the language of the host country is different. In which language should I be evaluated?

Get an evaluation for all languages you may need to use either for research or for getting along on a daily basis. The feasibility of your research proposal depends on your language ability, so an evaluation in your research language is absolutely essential.

You will also be an academic ambassador, so you should expect to have a tourist-level knowledge of the commonly used local language, even if it is not your research language. Show an interest in learning the local language and explain what you are doing to get it.

Everybody speaks English these days. How important is language, really?

Really, really, important. The National Committee's opinion of your language abilities and/or plans to develop them is a significant part of their evaluation. You don't necessarily need to be fluent, but if you aren't, have a clear plan for linguistic development.

Research Proposal Tips

1. Write and re-write. Show drafts to your advisor, classmates, faculty in other fields, friends, neighbors, parents, and anyone else you can think of.
2. Remember that Fulbright committees at all levels are composed of experts from a wide variety of disciplines. It is possible that your discipline will not be represented at all. It is therefore *essential* that your proposal be comprehensible to someone outside your field. It also means you should:
 - 2.1. Find a friend in another field and show it to them. If they misunderstand it, then so will the committee.
 - 2.2. Be careful with technical terms. For example, the word "realism" looks simple and easily comprehensible, but it means very different things to scholars of literature and scholars of politics. Eliminate technical terms where possible, elucidate them where necessary.
 - 2.3. Write so that you capture a generally educated reader's attention. Make them curious about your questions, no matter what their background.
3. Eliminate any cute, clichéd, corny phrases or unnecessary plays on words. Do not make your project title sound like a newspaper headline. Avoid terms that are so over-used as to have lost their meaning, such as "deconstruct." And if you do need to use an over-used term, be sure to supply a concrete context of use. Vagueness kills a proposal.
4. Write concretely. Use the active voice.
5. A good proposal answers the following questions in this order: What? Where/when? How? Who?
 - 5.1. **What.** Begin with the broad intellectual issue you will be investigating. Try to make this compelling to a general audience; it should be a question that will grab a reader from any background. The main or primary question should be clear, and—as a matter of logic— there can only be one primary question. Other questions will relate to the primary question or problem.
 - 5.2. In this first part of your proposal, you will also provide some background to your question. Succinctly synthesize what is known. Try to relate your question to issues in the field; do not be narrowly focused on your discipline.
 - 5.3. **Where/when.** Fulbright looks for knowledge of the place. Your broad intellectual question should be made more specific by relating it to a location in space and time. You are proposing to study in a particular country because something there will shed light on the big question. What contribution will knowing something about this place (time) make to the larger intellectual problem articulated in the opening section?

- 5.4. In this section, your question gets specified. It should become clear how answering your question will contribute to the larger intellectual problems.
 - 5.5. It sometimes happens that the country you choose is not closely related to research. For instance, you may be proposing to work in a laboratory setting. In this kind of case, explain how you will engage with local scholars or the local community. Are there ways you can use your expertise contribute to the community or academic institution? If the committee thinks that you are going to simply stay in the lab and learn or contribute nothing to the locality, your proposal will look bad.
 - 5.6. **How.** This is the “methodology” of your proposal. Avoid jargon here too. Your audience may not know what a chi square test or a phenomenological interview is, or they may never have worked with literary texts. You will be doing something while in the country to gather information. In concrete terms, what will you be doing and how will that provide information that answers the main question of your study? What, specifically, will you be doing to this information to put it in a useful form?
 - 5.7. If you will be working in an archive or similar location, this is where you should show that you have a good sense of what is there to be found. Funding agencies do not support fishing expeditions. Give them reason to believe that you know what you are looking for and have a good chance of finding it. If you are working with specific texts, museums, archives, or libraries, name them.
 - 5.8. **Who.** A good proposal must convince the reader that you are qualified to do the proposed research. Some of this can go in the personal statement, but it is appropriate to mention research affiliations, previous experience, language skills, etc. in the main proposal.
6. There is no bibliography. In academic writing, we often use names as shorthand because author and audience have read the same books. In a Fulbright proposal there is no space for a bibliography, and the reader probably is not familiar with the key works in your field. Therefore, describe the debates, ideas, or theories to the reader. Show that you know the field by concise synthesis. Using names of key figures is OK—you don’t have to be cagey about referring to Aristotle or Einstein—but be sure that you are explaining to the reader what they need to know about them.
7. Use what you know. If you have already done preliminary research, or if you have experience in the country that is relevant, explicitly build on it. It can help make your proposal more concrete and specific.

Proposal FAQ

Can I add a bibliography?

Don’t even think about it. IIE will not accept more than two pages, and you need every bit of available space to explain your research.

What if I need to refer to a specific work?

If you absolutely positively need to refer to a specific work, use the author's name and the title of the work. If it is really well known in the broad field, you might just use the name and date. Please visit the Grant Writing Resources webpage here for examples: <https://gs.emory.edu/professional-development/sharpening-skills/grant-writing/resources.html>.

Is the page limit absolute?

Yes. Proposals that do not conform to the requirements are rejected without being read.

Personal Statement Tips

1. The personal statement gives you a place to convince the reviewers that you are qualified both for the research and the ambassadorial functions of a Fulbright Fellowship.
2. The personal statement is thus both a narrative CV and story of your own professional trajectory.

Talk about experiences that helped form your project in this country, what you expect to gain from being there, how you will engage with the local communities (both scholarly and non-scholarly), and how the trip will contribute to your future plans.

3. Be concrete, but don't be cute. Do you include stories about how much you love your parents, friends, or travel to exotic lands? Do you wax eloquent about what a caring, concerned individual you are? Omit these sections and share them with mom on the phone.
4. The personal statement is a good place to discuss:
 - Your plans to develop the language skills required for your research.
 - Your experience in the country or other relevant experiences.
 - Your training, including coursework or specialized research techniques. Again, think in terms of a field, not your discipline. A committee member with a political science background may be unimpressed when you say you took a course on Hegel; they may be much more interested when you talk about your training in political philosophy.

The Interview

1. Interviews are scheduled at 45-minute intervals. Arrive at least five minutes early and, because some interviews run overtime, prepare to wait. The committee is asked to evaluate how you will respond to the stresses of overseas research, including the everyday frustrations of life.

If you respond to a delay in your scheduled interview with anger, impatience, or petulance, it will be difficult for the committee to certify that you are equipped to handle the dual pressures of conducting research and representing the United States abroad.

2. Committee members often pose questions in the language your research requires (e.g., Arabic, French, Hindi, German). If your language skills are not what they should be, have a concrete plan for gaining competence. Language skills make the difference between a good proposal and a funded proposal.
3. Expect tough questions about your research problem, methodology, and your preparation to do what you propose. The purpose is to engage you in a serious, if brief, discussion of your proposal. You may find them more critical of your work than any other faculty or students have been. The ability to think on your feet, remain composed, and respond thoughtfully is one of the things that Fulbright is looking for.
4. The goal of the committee is to help you make your proposal as strong as it can be. If they find defects or confusions, you can be guaranteed that the National Committee will too. So, expect them to be critical, but they will also try to be helpful. Feel free to email committee members after the interview and follow up on specific points or suggestions.
5. Be prepared to listen to other perspectives and to be open to suggestions. Avoid patronizing or defensive tones. Expect to take notes; bring paper and pencil.
6. Recommendations for revision, if any, will be emailed to you after your interview. Do not wait for written comments to begin revising your proposal. Consider possible revisions as soon as you walk out the door.

Think about questions raised in the interview. Discuss the interview and follow-up comments with your advisor. In all cases, the committee's recommendations are advisory; you know the area best, and the ultimate proposal is yours.

FULBRIGHT WORKSHOP FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

Exact Day/Time TBD: one-day workshop during the week of August 10-17

Location: TBD, in-person

If you intend to apply for a Fulbright award this fall, then this one-day workshop is for you. It will provide an opportunity to get early feedback on your Fulbright proposal and personal statement. It will also be a chance to discuss some of the other particularities of Fulbright, such as affiliations and language evaluations.

This will be a workshop, and you will be helping each other write clearer, more persuasive proposal. Proposals and personal statements will be circulated to all participants, and each proposal will be discussed in detail by the group. There will also be time for questions and answers about the Fulbright process. See the [LGS Fulbright page](#) for specific expectations and deadlines.

If you intend to apply for a Fulbright, you are strongly encouraged to participate. We have offered this workshop for more than a decade, and we have found that students who attend are significantly more likely to succeed than those who do not.