



## Learning Abroad's Scholarship Essay Writing Tips

*Compiled with the generous support of the Meijer Office of Fellowships at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, Michigan*

### General Tips for Content

**FIND A HOOK:** Campus reviewers will read 30-40 essays, National reviewers for Gilman and Boren will read between 80-100 essays— all of them about study abroad. Catch their attention with an interesting, short anecdote or quote, or start with information about why you, your background, experiences or motivations to take part in your proposed program deserve to receive funding. The strongest personal statements give readers a three-dimensional image of the author. You want to write an essay that comes off the page.

Strategies for beginning introductory paragraphs:

- Analogy
- Anecdote
- Background Information
- Figurative language
- Quotation
- Statistics
- Brief Description of terms
- Humor
- Historical Information
- Quotation
- Rhetorical Question
- Short Narration
- Startling fact
- Statistics
- Vivid Contrast
- Writer's experience with the subject

*This is adapted from a downloadable appendix provided by Cengage. The complete version available at:*  
[https://www.cengage.com/resource\\_uploads/downloads/1413031188\\_155420.pdf](https://www.cengage.com/resource_uploads/downloads/1413031188_155420.pdf)

Examples:

- "As her breathing became faster and faster, I realized I had to act quickly. She was suffering from an intense panic attack that prevented her from talking or breathing. This patient had recently endured an accident that had left her lying completely flat on the bed in a neck brace. It was my responsibility as an Emergency Room Volunteer to be with her and comfort her. The doctors came and took care of her, but I was eager to have the skills to improve her situation. Wilderness Medicine in the Alps is an unmatched opportunity to expand my knowledge of treating medical problems, various illnesses, and management of trauma"
- "Throughout my life, my family was homeless. Every time we moved into a new house, it never seemed permanent. But money always got tight and the landlord's calls became more frequent...I am choosing to attend a community service study abroad program because not eating or having a place to stay stunted my ability to focus in school and I want to learn how to utilize community resources to make this less of a reality for other families."

- “I was born in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and moved to the U.S. in 2010. I learned a lot about the world and myself when I moved to Chicago...Before coming to the U.S., my sister and I stopped over in South Africa. We were supposed to stay in the hotel room, but we could not resist the temptation to explore. I was attracted to the way South African people displayed their goods.”

**DON'T ASSUME ANYTHING:** Remember that reviewers likely do not know you. While there is a chance that campus reviewers may know you, but Gilman reviewers come from across the country. They may never have heard of your home institution. They may know nothing about the geography of your state or regional distinctions. Explain everything. For example, we encourage students to provide basic facts, such as “The University of Utah is a 35,000-student public research university located in Salt Lake City, Utah.” Bottom line: Do not expect others to understand the context behind who you are or what you want to do.

**CONTEXT IS IMPORTANT:** Give readers the details and supporting evidence to demonstrate why they should fund your application. This might involve unpacking details about your background, your family, your hometown, your academic and professional goals. What makes you unique? What challenges have you overcome? Where does this study or intern abroad experience fit in your goals and plans for the future?

**BE SPECIFIC:** If you can substitute another country or another person in a sentence/statement and it still makes sense, you are not being specific enough. Your essay should not simply focus on why you want to study or intern abroad. It should focus on why you want to study or intern a) in a specific country, b) on a specific program, c) during a specific term. Talk about the program you chose and help readers understand why it is a good fit and what it will contribute to your academic, personal and/or professional development. Include DETAILS. REMOVE any general / vague statements.

**PROVIDE EVIDENCE:** Unless you provide the reader with an argument and supporting evidence, you are not likely to receive funding. For example, “studying/interning abroad will be beneficial to my career” is insufficient. What are your personal/professional/academic/career plans? How does your specific study/intern abroad program/location/language of study benefit those goals?

**STAY FOCUSED:** Make sure you fully answer the questions or prompts posed in the application. Demonstrate authenticity, clarity, conviction and passion about your pursuits. Use assertive language such as, “I intend” or “I will” instead of “I might” or “I hope.”

## Gilman Scholarship Tips (1/2)

**Summary:** Be detailed and able to connect your goals and identity to why you decided to go abroad and why you picked your program. While students should be succinct, providing details will help the reader understand how committed you are. Additionally, plan to look up community partners you would like to work with and reflect upon how you can advocate for international experiences within these.

**The Statement of Purpose essay is an important factor in the selection process. You should carefully review your essay and ask an advisor to proofread your essay for spelling, grammar, and content prior to submission. In your essay, be specific in describing your individual reasons for studying abroad, keeping in mind that this is a scholarship for academic study abroad and credit-bearing international internships.**

- Gilman applicants should explicitly state in essays if they
  - come from an underrepresented or diverse ethnic, religious or cultural background
  - will intern (for credit) while abroad
  - are a first-generation college student
  - are a first-generation American and/or the child of immigrants
  - are a community college student (or transfer student)
  - are a post-traditional aged college student (or are financially independent)
  - are a student veteran (student vets receive the highest possible priority in this category); are the child of an active duty service member (new Gilman-McCain Scholarship)
  - are a student with disabilities
  - identify as a LBGQTQIAA+ student
  - STEM majors (including health fields)
  - have overcome significant barriers to personal development or educational attainment (stories of overcoming challenges make for very strong essays)
- Write about how your identity has influenced your decision to go abroad...but make sure it flows and isn't just thrown in there.
- Applicants need to show that they have done research on the country and also the program and what it offers. If you don't know all the details about the internship, that's OK. Talk about anything you do know and how extracurricular activities/outings could supplement the internship.
- Connect your program/location choice to your short and long-term goals. Applications are more competitive when applicants have specific goals that directly connect to their program choice.
- If you are going on a long-term program, talk about one or two courses you're interested in taking and clubs/opportunities that you will join. This shows that you've done research and plan to take full advantage of your time abroad.
- Save some of the activities you will be doing abroad for the Community Impact essay. Do not copy content from the Personal Statement into the Community Impact essay.

## **Gilman Scholarship Tips (2/2)**

**When you are overseas, how will you contribute to the mission of building mutual understanding between the people of your home community and the people of your host community?**

- Applicants should not just summarize what it means to create a mutual understanding. Rather, provide specific examples for how you plan to engage with the local community. Explain how you will share your culture with locals and learn about the local culture.
- Some examples: taking dance lessons native to the country, volunteering at a school, hosting dinner exchanges, getting involved with sports club, etc.

**The goal of the Follow-on Service Project is for Gilman Scholars to increase awareness of study abroad and the Gilman Scholarship among their peers in their home communities and campuses. Summarize your Follow-on Service Project Proposal in paragraph format by addressing all of the following questions, in no particular order.**

- Strong applicants provide evidence that they have already been developing a plan and working with different offices, community members/organizations, and/or high schools - not just preparing a hypothetical project. Show that regardless of being awarded Gilman, you are an advocate for international experiences
- Some examples: working with engineering orgs at university, developing online brochures for major with possible programs, presenting in high schools to catch students early, creating cultural exchange nights, etc.