



# Student Applicant Guide to Sea Grant Fellowships

The following document contains advice on different aspects of a fellowship package. While we encourage students to review and follow these tips, doing so does not guarantee selection for a fellowship program.

We encourage students to reach out to the state Sea Grant Program through which they are applying to learn more about the program. Additionally, students should request to be connected with alumni to learn more about the program and to help shape the key skills and experience to highlight in their application.

## You Found a Fellowship, What Now?

You have found a fellowship that you are interested in. Before diving into the application, here are a few things to consider to help prepare for the process:

- Review the application in its entirety! Gain an understanding of the timeline, application process, what the application entails and how it will be reviewed.
- Take the time to learn about the program that you are applying to. What is the mission of the larger program, as well as the goals and objectives of the specific fellowship?

## How to Work Your Personal Statement

"We should not judge people by their peak of excellence; but by the distance they have traveled from the point where they started." - Henry Ward Beecher.

Personal: "of, affecting, or belonging to a particular person rather than to anyone else."

Statement: "a definite or clear expression of something in speech or writing."

Think about what makes you and your life experiences unique, and how you can express this clearly and concisely.

## Pre-writing

- Truly review and understand the fellowship you are applying to, as well as the statements/questions that are outlined in the fellowship position.
- Need some inspiration? Talk to the people who know you best. Get their opinions of you as a person, worker, and/or student as a starting point.
- Think like the reviewer. Why should someone choose me? Are there any gaps or discrepancies that may need to be addressed for an outsider to understand?
- Brainstorm the skill sets and experiences you know are important and want to emphasize. Then, organize your thoughts via a draft or outline before you dive in.

## Things to consider when writing

- The personal statement is meant to complement your CV and further expand on points in your CV or your specific path. For instance, consider clarifying why any experiences on paper may seem disjointed; use this as an opportunity to connect them and/or fill in gaps.
- Read all questions thoroughly and follow all directions (e.g., word counts and scoring criteria).
- Be mindful of word choices and your tone of voice, and use active, present-tense vocabulary.
- Give real examples from your professional and/or personal experience.
- Be specific about your goals for the future and how this opportunity fits into your plan, or if you are not entirely sure, be specific about why this opportunity will help you to figure out the next steps in your career.

**Remember: You want to create a cohesive story and image of yourself with just a piece of paper and a few hundred words. Make them all count, be intentional.**

## While writing

- Give yourself plenty of time to write and rewrite. Ask a friend, colleague or family member to review your writing, both stylistically and grammatically.
- Read it out loud as you go and listen for flow and cohesion. Make sure you are not repeating yourself or leaving the reader wanting more.
- Be honest, use your own words and your own voice (do, however, use your resources, research Sea Grant mission statements and goals, research programs, etc.).

- Concentrate on your strengths, but also speak to areas where you have taken chances, misstepped or even failed. Express how you adapted, learned and grew.

## Before you submit

- Carefully review all of your written materials for grammar, typos and clarity. Have multiple people, from multiple fields (e.g., your parents, advisor, labmate), proofread your essays. Be sure your reviewers are clear about who your audience will be.

**Pro Tip: Gain a deeper understanding of what the fellowship is looking for in candidates by reviewing the call for applicants.**

## Demystifying the Curriculum Vitae

### General Tips

- **Use active language.** [Here is a list of strong action words.](#)
- **Make it as easy as possible for the reader.** Keep your language clear and word choice simple and concise. For example, pull out extraneous words that don't add any value to what you are trying to say, and do not use acronyms. Any reader should be able to understand your writing, regardless of their background.
- **Have multiple people proofread.** Grammatical errors will distract from what you're saying.
- **Substitute weak, repetitive verbs for stronger, more unique ones.** For example, instead of "helped," try "coached," "mentored," or "facilitated"; instead of "managed," try "directed," "oversaw," or "led."

### Things to highlight in your CV for Knauss

- Demonstrate a variety of experiences. For example, employment, volunteer, and/or extracurricular activities in academic, applied, research, administration, outreach, or policy positions.
- Emphasize relevant academic, professional and/or personal experiences and how they apply to public service. Make sure to present yourself in a non-partisan fashion, as this is a non-partisan fellowship.
- Highlight experiences that show prior leadership roles relevant to your career stage. For example, roles in student government, faculty committees, advisory committees, professional societies, or even workplaces or community initiatives.

**Pro Tip: Look for keywords in the fellowship description and review criteria (and job postings in general). Use these words in your CV and tailor it to highlight the specific attributes the reviewers will be looking for.**

## Additional Resources

- Understanding the difference between a resume and a CV  
<https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/assignments/cv/>
- Words to include/exclude in a resume/CV  
<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/words-to-avoid-and-include-on-a-resume>

## Recommendations for Your Letters of Recommendation

“Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much.” - Helen Keller

### Who to ask

- Be strategic about who you ask. Ask someone who not only knows you but also knows what you have accomplished and how you navigated them.
- Requesting a letter from someone with an important title but who can only speak to your skills tangentially may not be the strongest choice.
- Some examples of folks to ask include professors, mentors, bosses, or supervisors.
- Do not ask a family member to write a letter of recommendation for you.

### How to ask

- It is nice to be able to ask for letters of recommendation in person, when possible. However, it is completely appropriate to ask your academic advisors, supervisors, professors, and colleagues, both past and present, for a letter of recommendation via email.
- Emphasize the question, “Can you write me a strong letter for this specific fellowship opportunity?” Perhaps broach this by explaining the fellowship objectives and competition process.
- Ask for the letter in a way that provides them an easy opportunity to decline. If the person is truly too busy or knows they are not a strong writer, it is best to know this in advance. You do not want a half-hearted letter of reference.
  - You could ask, “Do you feel you know me well enough to write a strong letter of recommendation for the Knauss program?”

- Have a list of folks whom you can ask for recommendations.
- Provide different/appropriate information for different writers.
- Give your writers plenty of lead time (4-6 weeks) to write the letters, and keep a consistent line of communication. It is okay to send reminders (2 weeks and 2 days in advance).
- Always thank your letter writers.

## How to prepare your letter writer

- Provide insightful materials to letter writers. Give them the specific information they need to provide examples of your work ethic, character and qualifications, as well as how these will be reviewed (i.e., your updated CV and application materials, including your personal statement).
- Make sure they know what should go into the letter (i.e., what the fellowship is, and who they are looking for).
  - Knauss letters of reference should:
    - Explain why you are qualified, emphasizing why you are a good fit for the Knauss Program, and demonstrate knowledge and abilities supported by evidence (examples). Skills to focus on include: broader communication skills; leadership potential; self-direction; a willingness and flexibility to tackle issues beyond their area of expertise; and an openness and capacity to expand their experiences.
  - Strong letters of reference should:
    - Provide your connection to the letter writer, use specific examples or anecdotes to convey your qualifications as relevant to the Knauss fellowship program, speak to your character and emphasize why you are the perfect fit for the position.

**Pro Tip: Schedule an appointment or meeting with your letter writers well in advance. Discuss the program to which you are applying, the selection criteria, and highlight your most relevant professional experiences. Make this process as easy for the writers as possible.**

## Additional Resources

- Tips to provide to your letter of reference writer:  
<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/letter-of-recommendation-writing-tips>

# Interviewing 101

“One important key to success is self-confidence. An important key to self-confidence is preparation.” - Arthur Ashe.

## Pre-Interview

- Ask for the interview questions ahead of time. You may not always receive them, but if you do, read and practice answering them. If you do not get the questions in advance, practice responding to the types of questions you may get.
- Analyze the job description, consider how your experiences make you the perfect fit.
- Figure out the meeting technology in advance. Practice it beforehand.
- Practice the standard run-of-the-mill questions. For example, why you want the job/position, why you are qualified and what you will bring, etc. Practice, practice, and then practice again.

## During the Interview

- Have a professional demeanor. Maintain eye contact and try not to fidget.
  - Body language tips:  
<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/interviewing/body-language-during-interview>
- Pay attention to the time to ensure you can answer all questions thoroughly.
- Show your interest by doing your research and coming prepared with well-thought-out questions.
  - Common interview questions:  
<https://www.glassdoor.com/blog/common-interview-questions/>
- When answering situational questions, try the STAR method:
  - **Situation:** Set the stage, provide any additional background details needed.
  - **Task:** Explain what your specific responsibilities were during the process.
  - **Action:** Describe the steps you took to address the situation.
  - **Result:** Explain what the outcomes of your actions achieved!

- Have some STAR situations in mind ahead of the interview. Think about what is typically asked. Prepare two or three examples of situations that highlight how you overcame a challenge, and another few that highlight how you stepped up and became a leader, etc.

**Pro Tip: Ask who will be interviewing you in advance and learn a little about them in advance.**

### **Additional Resources**

- Interview cheat sheet & tips for stress: <https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/Interview-Cheat-Sheet>
- Power Pose TED Talk: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ks-\\_Mh1QhMc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ks-_Mh1QhMc)

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