



# 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, following them does not guarantee that you will be selected 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

Quote: "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 exclaim this in a clear and concise way.

*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 place to start.

- 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 some skill sets and experiences you know are important and that you want to emphasize - then organize your thoughts via 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 things in your CV or expand on your specific path. For instance, maybe provide clarity as to why the experiences on paper seem disjointed, use this as a time to connect them and/or fill in gaps.
- Read all questions thoroughly and follow all directions (i.e., word counts, scoring criteria).
- Be mindful of word choices and your tone of voice, use present tense vocabulary.
- Give real examples from your past - both professional and/or personal.
- 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 - listen to the flow and for 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, pursue Sea Grant mission statements and goals, research programs, etc.).
- Concentrate on your strengths, but also speak to areas where you have taken chances, misstepped and even failed, and express how you adapted, learned and grew.

*Before you submit:*

- Carefully review **all** of your written materials (grammar, typos!). Have multiple people (and from multiple fields - i.e., your parents, your advisor, your labmate) proofread your essays, make sure they are clear to your audience.

**Pro Tip:** Gain a deeper understanding of what the fellowship is looking for in it's 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.** Make it readable to all when considering language and word choice, keep it simple (i.e., only use subheadings if needed, pull out extraneous words that don't add any value to what you are trying to say) and clear.
- **Have MULTIPLE people proofread.** Grammatical errors will distract from what your saying (ensure everyone can understand regardless of background or position, i.e., your professor vs a graduate student in another field vs your sister)

- **Substitute weak, repetitive verbs for stronger unique ones** (i.e., instead of “helped” try “coached”, “mentored” or “facilitated”, instead of “managed” try “directed”)

#### Things to highlight in your CV for Knauss:

- Demonstrate your experience in a **diverse** capacity (i.e., employment, volunteer, or extracurricular activities in academic, applied, research, administration, outreach, or policy positions)
- Emphasize your academic, professional **AND/OR** personal experiences relevant and applicable to serving the American people
- Highlight experiences that show prior **leadership** roles relevant to your career stage. This could be student government, faculty committees, advisory committees, professional societies, or even 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 those 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

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

#### *Who to ask:*

- Be strategic about **who** you ask (people who know you well).
- Ask someone who doesn’t just know you, but knows what you have accomplished.
- Requesting a letter from someone who comes with an important title who may only be able to speak to your skills tangentially, may not be the strongest letter writer.
- Some examples of folks to ask include professors, mentors, a boss or supervisor.
- 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 (LOR) in person when possible, however it is completely appropriate to ask your academic advisors, supervisors, professors and colleagues both past and present for LOR via email
- Emphasize the question, “can you write me a **strong** letter?”
  - Perhaps broach this by explaining the 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, you do not want a half-hearted LOR
  - 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 who 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 constant line of communication going, send reminders (i.e., 2 weeks ahead, 2 days ahead)
- 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 LOR (i.e., what the fellowship is, and who they are looking for).
  - Knauss LOR should:
    - Explain why you are qualified, emphasizing why you are a good fit for the Knauss Program, demonstrate knowledge and abilities supported by evidence (examples). Skills to focus on include: broader communication skills; leadership potential, self-direction, and willingness and flexibility to tackle issues beyond their area of expertise and an openness and capacity to expand experiences.
  - Strong LOR in general should:
    - Provide your connection to the letter writer, use specific examples or anecdotes to convey your (specific to Knauss) qualifications, 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 LOR writer:

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/letter-of-recommendation-writing-tips>

**Interviewing 101**

Quote: “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 (yes, read them - then practice answering them).
- Analyze the job description, consider how your experiences make you the perfect fit.
- Figure out the meeting technology in advance (practice it ahead of time).
- Practice the standard run of the mill questions (i.e., 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:*

- Use professional demeanor (eye contact, no fidgeting, etc., body language tips: <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/interviewing/body-language-during-interview>)
- Pay attention to the time to ensure you are able to answer all questions completely.
- 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-type 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 (i.e., prepare 2 or 3 examples of situations that highlight how you overcame a challenge, prepare another few that highlight how you stepped up and became a leader, etc.)

**Pro Tip:** Ask who will be interviewing you in advance (then GOOGLE THEM).

**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>