

Writing the Rhodes Personal Statement

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When I interviewed for the Rhodes scholarship in 1999, I was told by the interviewers that they would be reading my essay, only to be told in my University's endorsement meeting that the committee members thought

rewrote my essay that weekend, cobbling over

result (and it served me well) and I continue to use the insights I gained from the experience, and from the 150+ Rhodes applications I have read as a selection committee member when I advise current scholarship applicants.

The personal statement often seems very nebulous, and indeed, it is the most difficult part of

This writing opportunity should be a chance for you to reflect on your values, your experiences, and to set ambitious goals for the future. It is an exercise in writing a research paper, except it's about your life) that answers the questions:

What makes me unique?

Why do I deserve this scholarship?

Answering these questions may involve considerable soul searching and conversation. Devote yourself to the process. Be prepared to write 10-15 drafts of your essay.

The best essay is able to lay out a clear argument and narrative thread between the work that you have

said, there are some general things that you should do in the essay:

- Have a strong opening sentence, or a "hook" that pulls the reader in. Avoid bland clichés like "All my life I have wanted to help people." "I have been fortunate to achieve a great deal in life so far, and I see the Rhodes as the logical next step." "I

was surrounded by a cloud of mosquitoes so thick that I could hardly breathe. I had to wear a mosquito net

which she hoped to devote her career to making the military more culturally sensitive. Another recent essay used a childhood passion for the World Book Encyclopedia as a motif for the

the applicants featured their accomplishments, but in the context of proving a larger argument.

- Avoid a resume essay – your readers will have a copy of your resume to begin with and this...”
- Avoid clichés at all costs. September 11th may have had a powerful effect on you. But unless you experienced it in an unusual way, your essay will likely sound like a news broadcast
- Include vivid visual examples – this is the evidence in your essay. Feature your experiences, but with specificity of detail. Don't say “I love music. I also love mathematics.” How can you connect your work in these areas with an image or a moment from your life?
- Show your diversity – not only the organizations you're involved in, but intellectual passions or activities done for fun. Are you a cellist in a garage band? Do you make stained glass in your free time? The more ways you are interesting to a committee, the more they will want to interview you. Plus, by having multiple interests, you seem like a somewhat normal person, rather than an accomplishment driven automaton.

out amidst pages of accomplishment hyperbole.

Consider your audience – The people reading your application are former Rhodes scholars and

the best students I have ever taught.” How do you distinguish yourself?

Solicit criticism widely and develop a tough outer shell. This will only make your application stronger

Keep revising and revising and revising

designed the month. Rhodes application was a great talented individuals and made them articulate their

ambitions. I hope that this experience of writing and reflecting is a valuable one to help you chart your