

WRITING A SUCCESSFUL STATEMENT OF INTENT FOR FLAS AWARDS (AND APPLICATIONS GENERALLY)

Here, I offer some tips for writing a successful application. I also offer occasional hypothetical examples in italics. Please note that these comments are suggestions, not requirements.

1. In the opening sentence, make explicit which language you will be studying and at what level. If you're applying for summer funding to study somewhere other than PSU, make explicit where you will be studying or hope to study. (Ideally, you should be able to state that you've already applied to the summer program you want to be part of at the time of the FLAS application.) As you'll recall, FLAS awards for the academic year must be used at PSU.

2. Before the end of the opening paragraph, be sure it is clear to the readers whether you're an undergrad or graduate student and what your major is (and what your minors are if relevant).

a) As a junior political science major with an interest in the evolving role of Berber political parties in North African countries, I am seeking FLAS funding for the study of intensive third-year Arabic this summer at Al-Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco.

b) I am a first-year MBA student seeking FLAS funding to continue studying Turkish at the second-year level.

3. Make clear what your intended future plans are wrt school and/or career, relating these to the conditions of the award if relevant. (E.g., Boren scholarships focus on security issues; Fulbright awards focus on being a good ambassador of the US abroad; FLAS awards increasingly focus on people who will be able to *use*—understand, speak, read, and write—the language they study in their careers.) What is important is *not* that you know exactly what you are going to do when you finish school, but that you demonstrate that you have a logical and plausible plan. (Notice that the student who wrote example (a) above has already begun to do this, so she has something to build on as she continues writing.)

4. Make clear why mastering the language you are studying is relevant and even necessary to your intended future/career path. Try to be explicit about what you will use the language for and whom you might be using the language with.

5. If you've been successful in attaining previous FLAS funding (or other funding for language study), be sure to mention what you achieved with the award.

With the FLAS scholarship I was awarded last summer, I participated in the intensive intermediate Persian language course at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Summer Institute with top marks. This year, I am enrolling in a reading and conference course each quarter with Professor Sedighi to work on my reading skills with a focus on topics in sociology, my major. If I am able to receive FLAS funding again for the coming summer, I will return to the program at Madison and should be able to place in the highest level Persian courses offered.

6. Acknowledge your GPA. If it's high, just state the fact.

I'm a rising senior, majoring in electrical engineering with a GPA of 3.8.

If your GPA is not especially high, do the best you can to account for why it is what it is. **If your GPA is low, do not assume that readers won't notice it; they will. Do the best you can to help them understand the situation.** Here are some possibilities:

a) Looking at your transcript, can you say that your GPA continues to rise?

With regard to my GPA, I must admit that I got off to a difficult start when I first came to PSU, but my GPA has risen steadily and consistently during my sophomore and junior years and is now a 3.1.

b) Can you offer a truthful account for why your GPA was especially bad during a particular period of time?

As is evident, my GPA suffered during my sophomore year. My father was stationed abroad in Afghanistan, where he was seriously wounded. I live with my parents, and the stress of the situation took a toll on my entire family. During this period, I was not able to do my best academic work. However, the following year, I had a GPA of 3.6.

c) If your GPA in your major and/or in the language you're studying is higher than your GPA overall, then focus on those.

While my overall GPA is 3.1, my GPA in my major is 3.7, and I have received an A in all the Persian courses I have taken.

7. Be sure to mention any connections you have to the region, whether here or there. Examples could include involvement in community organizations that include or serve the diaspora community, a language group that meets to practice the language, academic papers about the region you've presented at a student or academic conference, or travel to the region. If your family or

ancestors or from the region, you'll likely want to mention that fact though remember that the ability to speak a particular language isn't inherited. Just because your grandfather spoke Hebrew, that doesn't mean it will be easier for you to learn it than it will be for someone whose grandfather didn't speak it unless there are other factors involved—you grew up in a house where Hebrew was spoken, you've spent time in Israel or some other place where Hebrew is the primary language of communication, etc. Finally, if you're applying for summer funds and will be studying in the region, explain how that experience will add value to your language learning and to your education.

8. Rather than just enumerating your activities, your skills, or your strengths, show them as part of helping readers know who you are. *My volunteer work with the local chapter of Americans United for Palestinian Human Rights has helped me appreciate....* Notice how sentence's subject states (or reminds the reader) what you did, but the main part of the sentence explains what you took away from the experience.

9. Make clear how you'll maintain and build on the language you learn during the FLAS-funded program. In other words, how will you keep from losing the skills you develop? Options could include additional coursework, travel to/living in the region, involvement in the local diaspora community (provided you can explain how this will help you maintain or increase your language skills), etc.

10. It's often useful to explain briefly how you became interested in the region and study of the language you're studying. It is often useful to mention briefly your history/successes as a language learner.

I was lucky enough to spend a year in Buenos Aires in high school. While there, I was able to develop my language skills and become comfortable using Spanish all the time. When I returned to the US, I later received a score of 5 on the College Board's AP Spanish Language Test. In Argentina, I also had the opportunity to meet a number of Jewish Argentines and became interested in the diversity of the Jewish community there; in fact, this experience is what encouraged me to begin studying Hebrew, which is a heritage language for my family.

11. Don't inflate your achievements or overestimate what you can achieve. Avoid making statements like this one: *After a summer in the Istanbul program, I will be fluent in Turkish.* It takes years of studying a language (and often years living in a

culture where it is spoken) to become fluent in a language; most highly skilled nonnative speakers, especially if they are language teachers or work in language-related areas, are very aware of the limits of their abilities.

12. If you're having trouble figuring out how to conclude your essay or statement, mention whom you've asked to write letters on your behalf.

I have asked Dr. Birol Yesilada to write a letter of recommendation focusing on my achievements in my major and Dr. Pelin Basci to write about my progress learning Turkish. They are included with my application.

13. Your statement is not a place for lengthy or therapeutic narratives. (In other words, don't spend the first half of the page telling readers in detail about where you grew up, etc.) Keep things focused on demonstrating why you should be considered a strong candidate for the award.

14. Plan on submitting two different (but likely overlapping) statements if you are applying for both the summer and the academic-year awards. The programs are different, and you need to address those differences explicitly.

15. **Avoid coming across as entitled.** You simply can't write things like *Therefore, I deserve this award* or *In light of these facts, I am certainly a strong candidate for this award* or *Given my many achievements, I am a strong candidate for this award* if you expect to be taken seriously. Those who write letters of recommendation on your behalf can make such statements about you, but you can't make them about yourself.

16. Proofread, proofread, proofread. Get three friends to read the statement; better yet, try to get two professors to read the statement. Ask them for feedback—and be ready to hear it. And proofread again!

17. Be sure those writing letters for you have a copy of your application, including your statement and transcripts. The strongest letters will speak to your suitability for this award rather than being general letters of support.

18. Follow the instructions. A one-page essay is one single-spaced page long. Generally, it will have 1-inch margins on all four sides, and it will be printed in 12-point font.