COMMON APPLICATION MISSTEPS
...AND HOW TO AVOID THEM!

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IU GradGrants Center

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What are Grants?

- Grants (or fellowships) are monetary funding given by an organization, such as a governmental or academic institution, for a particular purpose.
- Grants can help you:
  - Fund study
  - Further language proficiency
  - Support field research and conference travel
  - Add lines to CV
  - Develop your professional persona

Fellowship and grant programs serve as stepping stones to reaching your long-term goals!
HOLISTIC MISTAKES

1. Ignoring the funder’s mission or guidelines
2. Not answering the question that was asked
3. Lack of readability
1. Ignoring the Funder’s Mission or Guidelines

**Why is this a mistake?**

- First and foremost, funders are looking for candidates whose work speaks to/furthers their mission.
- Application reviewers sometimes have to make decisions based on minute details.
  - Something as simple as not following page lengths could get your application thrown out.
1. Ignoring the Funder’sMission or Guidelines

• **How to fix it:**
  • Before you begin an application you should:
    • Know the mission of the funder AND your audience.
      • Why does the organization/grant exist?
      • Who is reviewing the grant application?
    • Review all of the resources about the specific grant.
      • Profiles of past winners
      • Examples of successful applications
      • Timelines for submission and review
      • Formatting requirements
2. Failure to Answer the Question That Was Asked

**Why is this a mistake?**

- Just like professors have a rubric of what they are looking for to keep scoring consistent, so do application reviewers.
- This is not the time and place to argue that the prompt is not what you would have asked.

Sample Fulbright-Hayes Technical Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>POSSIBLE</th>
<th>SCORED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Overall Comments</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of Proposed Project (Maximum 60 Points)</th>
<th>POSSIBLE</th>
<th>SCORED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Question 1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Question 2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Question 3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Question 4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Question 5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Question 6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SUB TOTAL 60**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualifications of the Applicant (Maximum 40 Points)</th>
<th>POSSIBLE</th>
<th>SCORED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Question 1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Question 2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Question 3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Question 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SUB TOTAL 40**

Sample Fulbright-Hayes Technical Review
2. Failure to Answer the Question That Was Asked

**How to fix it**

- Think about how the questions relate to and differ from each other.
- Think about their motivation for asking the question.
  - What are they trying to learn about applicants?
- Seek feedback and ask questions.
  - It's okay to ask the funder for clarification.
  - Come see us!
  - Consult a previous winner.
3. Lack of Readability

• **Why is this a mistake?**
  
  • Let’s imagine for a second that we are application readers...
    
    • You get to an application that is poorly organized or has ideas that are difficult to follow, what do you do?
3. Lack of Readability

• **How to fix it:**
  • Build intrigue with a strong abstract.
  • Use section headers.
  • Mirror the language in the mission statement of the funder → Readers will be looking for it.
    • Connect your work to the goals of the organization early on!
LANGUAGE CHOICE

4. Statement reads like an annotated CV
5. Discipline-specific jargon
6. Telling instead of showing
7. Hypotheticals
8. Overuse of passive voice
9. Negative tone
4. Statement Reads Like an Annotated CV

• Why is this a mistake?
  • Most applications have a work/educational history section already.
  • Statements should serve to draw attention to key points of your trajectory and illustrate motivation.
4. Statement Reads Like an Annotated CV

**How to fix it:**

- Look at your application holistically.
  - Understand what is already present in your other materials as you approach your statements.
  - Use your statements to draw connections between your CV and the aims of the funder.
- What from your past can help you prove that your ambitions are in line with the goals for the funder?
5. Discipline-Specific Jargon

Why is this a mistake?

- Inaccessible terminology decreases readability!
- Typically, application readers are highly educated, but not experts in your field.
5. Discipline-Specific Jargon

• **How to fix it:**
  • Find out as much as you can about who your readers will be.
    • If you absolutely cannot avoid using a term, make sure it is clearly defined at the first usage.
  • For help simplifying language:
    • Show it to someone outside of your field.
    • Approach it like an elevator pitch.
6. Telling Instead of Showing

• **Why is this a mistake?**
  • Let’s compare:
    • Ex: “I’m the best English teacher!” → No evidence, subjective
    • Ex: “Last year I was awarded the First-Year English Teaching Award.” → Evidence to support claim, objective
  • Without accompanying proof, statements read as exaggerations.
    • Readers have never met you; they have no reason to simply believe what you write.
    • It appears pompous, even when you aren’t.
6. Telling Instead of Showing

• **How to fix it:**
  • Seek feedback.
    • Another reader will recognize when you’ve failed to provide evidence.
  • Start drafting early and put down your material before edits.
7. Hypotheticals

- **Why is this a mistake?**
  - Another way in which you might be guilty of “telling instead of showing” → Ex: “If I am awarded a Fulbright grant, I hope to...”
  - Can look as if you haven’t thought through what the grant period would look like
  - Can come off as a lack of confidence in your ability
    - If you seem hesitant that you can accomplish your research, why should reviewers believe differently?
7. Hypotheticals

**How to fix it:**
- Use confident prose:

  **Avoid** conditionals such as “can”, “could”, “would”, “hope to”, or “if”.

  **Do use** strong verbs of intent like “plan”, “envision”, “imagine”, “seek to”.

  **Instead of:**
  “If selected to attend the Summer Language Workshop, I would…”

  **Try:**
  “By attending the Summer Language Workshop, I will…”
  “After completing the Workshop, I intend to…”
8. Overuse of Passive Voice

• Why is this a mistake?
  • Ex: “Data will be collected from the national library.”: The action’s “doer” is unclear.
  • Grant writing is as much about proving that you are the right person to carry out the research as it is about proving that your project is worthy of funding.

What we will learn as the result of the proposed project?
Why it is worth knowing?
How we will know that the conclusions are valid?
Why you should be the one to conduct the study?
8. Overuse of Passive Voice

• How to fix it?
  • Be self-referential
  • Use active verbs such as...

- Identify
- Assess
- Contrast
- Apply
- Examine
- Employ
- Illustrate
- Debate
- Integrate
- Predict
- Suggest
- Measure
- Distinguish
- Infer
- Synthesize
- Differentiate
- Translate
- Revise
- Generalize
- Evaluate
- Appraise
- Compose
- Collect
- Complete
- Deduce
- Estimate
- Gather
- Instruct
- Assemble
- Detect
- Create
- Initiate
- Illustrate
- Guide
- Classify
- Compile
- Critique
- Generate
- Hypothesize
9. Negative Tone

• Why is this a mistake?
  • You want to **show growth**, not **give excuses**.
  • We’ve all had personal and professional setbacks, but how do you react?
    • Humility, reflection, growth breed confidence and respect from others.
    • Whining and excuses breed pity and negative reaction from others.
9. Negative Tone

**How to fix it:**
- State the facts, but then move on to positive statements.
  - What did you learn?
  - How did you grow?
- Solicit feedback:
  - Another reader will more easily recognize if your language leaves a negative impression.
RESEARCH DESIGN

10. Already been done
11. Not feasible
12. “I’m filling a gap in the literature!”
10. Already Been Done

**Why is this a mistake?**

- Funders are often looking to expand understanding, spark new research.
  - Wenner-Gren: Expand anthropological theory
  - Fulbright: Enhance mutual understanding, “open minds to the world”
  - NSF: Pioneer scientific research and discovery
- Just because it’s new to you doesn’t mean it’s never been done.
10. Already Been Done

**How to fix it:**
- Even if your grant doesn’t require a literature review, it’s a good idea to do it for yourself.
  - Gain knowledge of what is/is not understood on your topic.
  - Often grant writers will reflect on methodological limitations or realms for future work.
11. Not Feasible

Why is this a mistake?

- Doing innovative or exciting research doesn’t mean you ought to shoot for the moon!
- Is what you’re proposing feasible in terms of:
  - Your level of discipline-specific or methodological experience?
  - Your language proficiency?
  - Your proposed research environment (political/safety concerns, access to visas and local contacts)?
  - Your expected timeline?
  - Your anticipated budget?
11. Not Feasible

**How to fix it:**
- Seek feedback early and often.
-Balance ambitions against reality.
  - Talk to others who have conducted similar work.
  - A thorough literature review for lessons from previous studies can help you understand what could be a stretch.
- Recognize that what’s feasible in U.S. academic settings is not always feasible abroad.
  - Acclimation takes time.
12. “I’m Filling a Gap in the Literature”

• Why is this a mistake?
  • Simply telling readers there is a gap in existing literature doesn’t show:
    • Why the gap exists.
    • Why the new research is significant.
    • What would we learn from it.
    • How would it advance your field’s research.
12. “I’m Filling a Gap in the Literature!”

**How to fix it:**

- Focus on outcomes of the research if it were to be carried out.
  - It’s your task to prove why we could benefit and why you personally have the capacity to make that contribution.
- If you find yourself only drawing attention to the gap:
  - Ask yourself: “Why is this gap here? What is the benefit in filling it?”
MINDSET

13. Not seeking feedback
14. Waiting until the last minute
15. Giving up
13. Not Seeking Feedback

**Why is this a mistake?**
- There is no such thing as bad feedback—unless you receive it after the deadline!
- Feedback can help you gain a sense of:
  - Readability and terminology use.
  - Negative tone.
  - Lack of evidence.
  - Feasibility concerns.
13. Not Seeking Feedback

- **How to fix it**
  - Start early!
  - Let go of the idea that it needs to be perfect before you show it to anyone—with the possible exception of your advisor.
  - GGC is here to help at all stages of the application.
14. Waiting Until the Last Minute

**Why is this a mistake?**

- Application cycles often close 6-12 months before you ever see any money.
  - You need to anticipate your funding needs before you know your research questions.

**When preparing an application:**

- If you cut it too close, even well-intentioned friends, GGC consultants, and advisors can’t make time to read it.
- Limits your ability to digest and respond to comments.
- If you have letters of recommendation, this can put a lot of undue stress on your writers.
- In the end, weak letters, typos, or a poorly-thought-out design only reflect poorly on you!
- Sometimes putting down your materials and letting thoughts stew in the back of your mind can be beneficial to overcoming road backs.
14. Waiting Until the Last Minute

- **How to fix it**
  - Start as early as possible!
    - If you know that you are likely to push it in favor of something else, commit to it by:
      - Scheduling an appointment to brainstorm with the GGC.
      - Make a writing date with a friend.
15. Giving Up

• Why is this a mistake?
  • We all hit moments where we think it’s a long shot, and we could never win.
    • You can’t be considered for an award if you never submit it.
    • They will give the funding to someone, and you never know how you compare to other applicants.
15. Giving Up

• **How to fix it:**
  • Put it in perspective.
    • Maybe a $500 award isn’t worth three months of work, but a $24,000 one likely is. ($8,000 in income for each month of work!)
  • Look at how the funding (or the lack of it) could alter your trajectory.
  • Be honest with yourself about why you’re considering giving up.
  • Seek a mentor.
GGC SERVICES

- Funding searches
- One-on-one consultations
- Walk-in hours
- Workshop series
Funding Searches

• Funding search resources
  • GGC consultants can help students find relevant funding sources:
    • Travel
    • Conferences
    • Research projects
    • Pre-Dissertation
    • Dissertation Writing

Email gradgmt@indiana.edu to schedule an appointment

http://pivot.cos.com/funding_main
One-on-One Consultations

- Help draft/edit grant proposals
  - Either in-person or electronically via email or Skype
- External (non-IU) funding opportunities
- We are open in the summer, with limited hours.
- Schedule an appointment
  - Email gradgmt@indiana.edu
  - Provide GGC with draft 48 hours in advance of consultation

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Weekly Walk-In Hours

- 12:00pm to 2:00pm, Tuesdays & Fridays
- Wells Library, Room E544 (5th floor, East Tower)
  - Internal and external grants, without appointment
  - Funding searches
  - General questions
Workshop Series

• Three or four workshops per semester, geared toward common needs
  • One hour followed by an hour of Q&A
  • Social Science Research Commons (Woodburn 200)
• Fall 2017 workshops will be announced in late summer!
Upcoming Things of Interest

• Information sessions for the Fulbright U.S. Student Program, Hutton Honors College Great Room (IU CARE):
  • Friday, March 31, 4-5pm
  • Friday, April 14, 4-5pm
  • Friday, April 28, 4-5pm

• GGC Summer 2017 Fulbright Bootcamp
  • July-August 2017 (8 weeks, exact dates TBA)
  • Completely on Canvas
Any Questions?

• How to find us:
  Herman B. Wells Library, East Tower, Office 544E

• How to contact us:
  • Email: gradgmt@Indiana.edu
  • Website: http://www.indiana.edu/~gradgmt/
  • Twitter: @iugradgrants