

Essay Application Tips and Advice: P. D. Soros Fellowships for New Americans

These tips were compiled by Nancy Simpson-Younger, the Fellowships and Scholarships Advisor at PLU. Do feel free to get in touch: simpsonl@plu.edu. I'm always happy to videochat or e-mail!

About the Fellowship:

The P. D. Soros [Fellowships](#) for New Americans provide a \$25,000 stipend per year, as well as paying half of the cost of a graduate program's tuition and fees. To be eligible, you must be an immigrant or the child of an immigrant. The program emphasizes "creativity, originality, initiative, and sustained accomplishment," and it's important to demonstrate these qualities in the two 1000-word essays included in your application package. The application is due on October 29th.

Showing, Not Telling

How do you prove that you have particular qualifications or attributes in an essay? First, you have to back up each claim with direct evidence. Otherwise, you're asserting something, but not proving it. Here are some examples:

- **Telling (less good):** Because of my strong initiative, I can be trusted with important tasks.

As a reader, I'm left wondering. What are these tasks? Why are they important? Has anyone trusted you in the past? (What does "strong initiative" mean, precisely?)

- **Showing (better):** Last year I was hired to be a German tutor, working with an intermediate student for one hour a week in the library. After meeting my client and learning about his interests, I decided to spend the first ten minutes of each session discussing his most recent soccer games in German. This technique helped us to build a rapport, which made it much easier to introduce and practice vocabulary relevant to my client's life.

Here, by explaining your pedagogical methods, you've told me that you're organized, good at time management, flexible enough to incorporate your another person's interests, and aware of how language learning actually works. All of those things show me that you take initiative as a German tutor.

How do I edit my work for specificity and clarity?

Imagine that you've written this sentence:

- "I want to earn my graduate degree because I've always been passionately committed to the ideals of learning in community and contributing to the development of science."

That's not a bad sentence! But it's also not specifically linked to a particular program or experience, and it doesn't explain what subject you're interested in. So we're going to add a follow-up that delves into specific detail:

- "The PhD program in astrophysics at Brown University would allow me to collaborate in a combined laboratory with students of physics and chemistry, so that we could work together to investigate comet trajectories and composition from a more rigorous interdisciplinary perspective."

The second sentence cites specific examples to prove a claim and links to the specific degree program that the speaker is hoping to pursue.

If you only have room for one of those sentences within the word count, you can combine the best features of both. That might look something like this:

- “Because I’m committed to rigorous, interdisciplinary science, I’m applying for a PhD in astrophysics at Brown University, where I can collaborate directly with physics and chemistry students to study comet trajectories and composition.”

How to Edit Down to Meet a Word Limit

It can be extremely difficult to get down to a word limit. While the Soros Fellowship has two essays that are 1000 words each, I’m going to model the process of “editing down” on a much smaller essay of 100 words, just to give you a sense of how things might go:

- First try: "After I graduate from PLU, I'm planning to become a college professor, specializing in English literature of the early modern era. Because I'm particularly compelled by Sir Philip Sidney's work, I'm planning to apply for graduate school to study the early modern lyric poets and their attitudes toward gender, with a special focus on questions of consciousness and disability theory. Getting a scholarship to the University of Kent would allow me to do my master's work near Penshurst, where I could consult manuscripts, learn from expert curators, volunteer at Sidney's estate, and deepen my understanding of early modern poetry. The experience would be invaluable for my future career preparation."

That's 109 words. Here are some options for getting to 100:

- Get rid of the last sentence, which just summarizes obvious things. (That makes it 99!)
- Stop saying "I." For example: "After I graduate from PLU, I'm planning..." could become "After graduating from PLU, I plan..."
- Rephrase things. "English literature of the early modern era" could become "early modern English literature." (In a pinch, "early modern" could even become "Renaissance.")
- Add precision. "Because I'm particularly compelled by Sir Philip Sidney's work" doesn't explain what compels you. That phrase could become "Focusing on sonnets that link gender to embodiment"--losing one net word, but adding an explanation, and allowing you to streamline later sections in a cascade effect.

It absolutely matters that you get to the word limit, because going over could be grounds for disqualification.

How do you avoid repeating information from other places in the application?

1. Before writing your second essay, re-read your previous essay first. Then, think about what would either complement or illustrate the claims that you've already made, without covering the same exact ground.
2. Before submitting, read your whole application out loud. Sometimes, when you hear yourself speak the same words or phrases, you can identify those moments more easily. (Then, rephrase them!)

If you'd like to get in touch, or if you have any questions, I'm happy to videochat or e-mail! You can reach me at simpsonl@plu.edu.