

Teacher Toolkit

Study of the U.S. Institute for Student Leaders

Study of the U.S. Institutes (SUSIs) for Student Leaders are five- to six-week academic programs for foreign undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 25 designed to improve their understanding of the United States and to develop their leadership skills. Institutes include a four-week academic residency consisting of interactive classroom activities, discussions, lectures, readings, site visits, and workshops; one week of educational travel to a different region of the United States; leadership skills building activities; community service; and opportunities to interact with their American peers on a college campus. Each institute includes approximately 20 participants from selected countries.

In order to promote the SUSI Program to our target audience (undergraduate students), the Fulbright Commission is reaching out to teachers and professors at universities and university colleges across Belgium.

What is the purpose of this toolkit? This toolkit is intended to provide teachers with the resources to teach the following skills to students in universities and university colleges:

DEVELOPING AN AMERICAN-STYLE RESUME AND COVER LETTER: Whether they are hoping to study in the United States or apply for an internship at a U.S. organization, knowing how to distinguish an American-style resume from a traditional European CV is an important skill for Belgian students.

CRAFTING A PERSONAL STATEMENT: Students applying to study in the United States will almost always be asked to submit a personal statement. These personal statements may be open-ended, allowing the students to write about themselves, but may also be themed. In the application for the SUSI Program, students are asked to write short (under 500 word) responses to the following essay prompts:

- Why you are interested in participating in this program? What do you hope to learn?
- Using one or more examples, please describe a challenge at school, work, or in your personal life that you have had to overcome. How did you resolve the situation?
- Participants in the Summer Institutes use their summer experiences to give back to their communities. In what ways can you imagine giving back to your community after you participate in the Summer Institute?

REQUESTING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION: Another important aspect of academic and professional applications, letters of recommendation can be daunting to students who feel that their professors and supervisors do not know them well enough to write about them.

How can teachers use this toolkit? That is up to you! We encourage you to use the resources included in this teacher toolkit to develop assignments and in-class activities for your students, and to share information with them about opportunities like the Study of the U.S. Institute for Student Leaders. We've also sent you a poster and a copy of the application form, which you are welcome to distribute.

The Commission for Educational Exchange between the United States, Belgium and Luxembourg provides accurate, unbiased information about study opportunities in the United States via its EducationUSA Advising Center. EducationUSA Advisers are available for consultation via phone, email, and in-person advising appointments. The Commission also administers the Fulbright Program for citizens of Belgium and Luxembourg, which provides scholarships for students and scholars to study, lecture, and conduct research in the United States.

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USA 101: The All-American Resume

RESUME VS C.V.

When Americans talk about a C.V., it is usually in an *academic* context. A *curriculum vitae* is used primarily by people applying for academic, scientific, or research positions. It is longer than a resume (usually 3+ pages) and contains a comprehensive statement about everything the applicant has ever done.

In the United States, applicants for jobs, internships, and other professional positions submit a *resume*. This is a short summary of your qualifications, including education, experiences (work, intern, volunteer), and skills. Above all, a resume is a marketing tool that allows a potential employer to decide whether or not he/she would like to learn more about you.

AN ALL-AMERICAN RESUME

An American style resume begins with your name and contact information (address, phone number, email address) at the top of the page. Most resumes will include the following sections, but yours may include additional information:

- **EDUCATION.** Include the name and location of college/university, dates attended, field of study, academic average, honors and awards, etc. Don't forget special study programs (like a summer or semester abroad), certificates, and/or other degrees.
- **WORK EXPERIENCE** ("Professional Experience", "Work and Volunteer Experience", "Employment"). Include job title, company name and location, and dates of employment. *Note that an American-style resume puts dates on the right; a British-style resume puts them on the left.*
- **SKILLS.** Include computer skills, foreign language proficiency, and any other interesting or important skill that is relevant to the job for which you're applying. (Leave out adjectives/personal descriptors.)

RESUME DO'S AND DON'T'S

DON'T include personal information like date/place of birth, nationality, or marital status.

DO brag. DON'T lie. If you have a stellar academic average, include it. If you are proud of what you accomplished at a recent internship, include it. If you were selected for a prestigious scholarship or organization, include it. But be honest: even a small lie on your resume can get you in a lot of trouble with an employer.

DO highlight your education. If you are a current student or a recent graduate, your educational experience is going to be one of the most recent and important aspects of your resume!

DO make good use of space. Your resume should be no longer than one page, but it's up to you to make the most of that space! Do not leave a lot of white space on the page, as it will immediately make a prospective employer think that you don't have enough experience to fill up a resume! Don't try to put too much: your resume should respect normal margins and use a standard-sized (11- or 12-point) font.

DO proofread. You want your resume to stand out ... but in a good way!

USA 101: The All-American Cover Letter

An American cover letter is an integral part of your job applications. It should refer to your present and future plans, showing your prospective employers what you want to do now and what you will do for them in the future. There are three different kinds of cover letters.

An *application letter* responds to a known job opening. An application cover letter should be specific to the position for which you are applying. It should explain the reasons you are interested in the position and *how* the specific skills and experience listed on your resume make you a good fit for the position.

A *prospecting letter* inquires about possible positions at a specific organization or company. It should contain more general information about why you are interested in the company and *why* your skills and experience would be an asset to them. Make sure to show that you have done your research about the company and to include information about how you can be reached!

A *networking letter* makes an introduction and requests information and assistance in a job search.

WRITING A COVER LETTER

Your cover letter should match your resume: use the same font and formatting, and insert your resume heading as a letterhead. Begin by including the contact information of the organization, the date, and the name of the person to whom you are writing (if possible).

The organization of a cover letter differs from position to position and person to person, but most include three basic paragraphs that answer the following questions:

- Who are you and why are you writing to them? (*How did you learn about the job? What qualifications in the job description make you the best candidate?*)
- Why are you the best fit for their organization and this position?
- How will you follow up with them from here? (*Can you request an interview?*)

Remember, your resume has already supplied the *what* – what you studied, what you have done in your last job. It's up to the cover letter to explain *why* and *how* your education, work experience, and skills make you a good fit for the job! It is your opportunity to connect the dots, explaining how the various information included on your resume comes together to make you the ideal candidate.

COVER LETTER DO'S AND DON'T'S

DO keep it professional. Make sure that your cover letter follows an acceptable format, including a professional introduction and closing. While your cover letter is your opportunity to show a prospective employer more about yourself, it is important to keep your language professional.

DON'T use clichés or generalizations. Be specific, clear, and to-the-point.

DO personalize your application. Many people create a generic cover letter template that can then be personalized for specific situations or job applications. The key is to personalize the document, explaining specifically how you are right for THIS position.

DO proofread. You want your application to stand out ... but in a good way!

Teaching Resumes and Cover Letters

Whether they are hoping to study in the United States or apply for an internship at a U.S. organization, knowing how to distinguish an American-style resume from a traditional European CV is an important skill for Belgian students.

Suggested Class Activities

- **RESUME WORKSHOP.** Ask students develop an American-style resume as a homework assignment. Instead of providing feedback on the first draft, hold a resume workshop. Students will receive the resume of another student and fill out an evaluation form (included). Students will then work on a second draft of their resume, which can be submitted for a grade.
- **PROSPECTING LETTER.** Ask students select a U.S. organization (e.g., company, law firm, startup) for which they would be interested in working and do research into the organization and the type of employees it hires. As a homework assignment, ask students to prepare a *prospecting letter* to inquire about possible positions at a specific organization or company. These can be submitted for a grade, or edited in class. If students are required to apply for internships, encourage them to develop multiple prospecting letters for the various organizations to which they are applying.
- **MOCK INTERVIEW.** Ask students to brainstorm as a class to develop a list of sample interview questions for an invented position (e.g., Class CEO). Hold mock interviews, and ask students to evaluate and make decisions about which of their classmates they would hire.

Additional Resources

- The Purdue Online Writing Lab at Purdue University provides a number of useful resources about writing, from citing sources to developing resumes. Visit owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/6/23 for more information.
- Scholastic provides entire week-long lesson plans to help younger students understand the importance of a resume and compile their own career portfolio. Visit www.scholastic.com/teachers/unit-plans/teaching-content/resume-writing for more information.
- The UC Berkley Career Center provides a concise overview of the differences to expect with a U.S.-style resume and even includes videos to explain the most important aspects of a successful resume. Visit career.berkeley.edu/IntnlStudents/IS-resume for more information.

Name: _____

Resume Workshop

APPEARANCE & FORMATTING

Does the resume look professional (e.g., font choice)?	YES	NO
Has the applicant made good use of available space?	YES	NO
Does this resume have clearly-defined sections (e.g., Education, Professional Experience)?	YES	NO
Does this resume include too much personal biographical information (e.g., date/place of birth, nationality, marital status, photo)?	YES	NO

What advice would you have for this applicant about the appearance of his/her resume?

CONTENT

Does this resume give you the information necessary to contact the applicant (e.g., phone number, email address)?	YES	NO
Does the applicant clearly list his/her educational history?	YES	NO
Does the applicant list accomplishments and <u>transferable skills</u> learned/developed under each professional position listed on the resume (instead of just a summary of responsibilities)?	YES	NO
Does the applicant use ACTION VERBS to create strong descriptions?	YES	NO
Does the applicant use CONCISE bullet points instead of sentences?	YES	NO
Does the applicant list his/her skills at the bottom of the resume?	YES	NO

Select one of the positions listed on the resume. Rewrite the description below using ACTION VERBS and CONCISE bullet points instead of sentences.

If you were interviewing this applicant for an internship, what questions would you have based on his/her resume? Could any of these questions be answered by including more information?

THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

The personal statement is one of the most important parts of an application, both for graduate study programs and for the Fulbright Program. According to a graduate admissions official from Princeton University, “It’s possible to redeem yourself or to kill your chances of admission with the personal statement. What’s most important to me is for the candidate to make a compelling case for himself or herself. I want to be persuaded that I should admit this person.”

Your personal statement is an opportunity to present a well-rounded view of yourself, your past experiences, and your motivations for applying. It is a *narrative* statement describing how you have achieved your current goals and what your plans are for the future...not a mere summary of your resume!

WRITING THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

Before sitting down to write your personal statement, it may be helpful to reflect on your motivations. Some helpful questions include: Why are you applying (to this scholarship, program, position, etc.)? What do you hope to get out of this experience? What are your long-term goals and how will this help you achieve them? How does your academic and professional experience make you a good candidate for this application? What would someone NOT know about you from looking at your CV?

It may be helpful to consider your personal statement as a story with a past, present, and future. First, why are you interested in the subject or field? How do your past experiences demonstrate that you are a qualified candidate for this program? Second, why are you applying for this program now? And lastly, how do you plan to use this degree in the future?

As you begin writing, remember that your personal statement should be *selective* (include the right information and avoid superfluous details), *original* (be creative and sincere), and *clear* (express your ideas correctly and logically). See below for more ‘do’s’ and ‘don’t’s’!

One of the most valuable things you can do with your personal statement is to have an outside source edit it for you. Ask them to point out irrelevant information, repetitive passages, and statements that need to be clarified or reworded. A good personal statement should make the reader want to keep reading, give them a clear understanding of your motivations and experiences, and leave them with a positive impression.

DON’T FORGET

Be honest. You should put your best foot forward and feel comfortable to brag a little bit in your personal statement. However, it’s important to be honest: do not lie about your accomplishments!

Embrace the narrative. It’s important to tell a story or find a specific angle from which to approach your personal statement. Avoiding recapping information from your CV or application (e.g., test scores, biographical data) and opt for specific narrative examples.

Proofread. For international students, your personal statement is yet another opportunity to prove your proficiency in English. Proofread to avoid grammatical errors, misspellings, etc.

Don’t use clichés or unnecessarily large vocabulary words! While using big words and wordy sentences might make you feel intelligent, the admissions office will not see it that way. Simpler language is preferable, as it clearly demonstrates that you can think and express yourself clearly – without resorting to a thesaurus!

Teaching Personal Statements

Students applying to study in the United States will almost always be asked to submit a personal statement. These personal statements may be open-ended, allowing the students to write about themselves, but may also be themed.

Suggested Class Activities

- **SELF-EVALUATION.** Ask students to create a first draft of a personal statement as a homework assignment. Instead of providing feedback on the first draft, hold a self-evaluation. Students will be asked to evaluate their own work based evaluation form (included), and then to exchange personal statements with a classmate. Students can submit a final draft of their personal statement for a grade.
- **TELLING A STORY.** One of the required essays for the SUSI Program application asks applicants: “Using one or more examples, please describe a challenge at school, work, or in your personal life that you have had to overcome. How did you resolve the situation?” Students will brainstorm 2-3 examples of a challenge they have faced and will evaluate how these different topics could make for a compelling story and what personal characteristics they reveal. They will then write this 500-word essay as a homework assignment and submit it for a grade.

Additional Resources

- Want to learn more about crafting the perfect personal statement or asking for letters of recommendation? Our YouTube Channel has a five-minute webinar with everything you need to know! Visit www.youtube.com/fulbrightbe to watch this and other webinars on a variety of topics. Students may also benefit from watching interviews with alumni of the SUSI Program, who speak about their time in the United States and the impact that it has had on their personal and professional development.

What is a Personal Statement?

- Opportunity to present a well-rounded view of yourself, your past experiences, and your motivations for applying to a university
- Narrative statement describing how you have achieved your current goals and what you hope to achieve in the future
- NOT a mere summary of your resume!

Crafting the Perfect Personal Statement (EdUSA Webinar)

Published on Sep 1, 2017
Considering studying in the United States? The admissions essay, or personal statement, is an important part of your application. This short video will tell you everything you need to know about crafting the perfect personal statement that will impress the admissions staff at a U.S. university.

EducationUSA makes applying to a U.S. college or university clear with Your 5 Steps to U.S. Study:

1. Research your options
2. Finance your studies
3. Complete your application
4. Apply for your student visa
5. Prepare for your departure

For more information about studying in the United States and to get in touch with an EducationUSA Adviser in Brussels, please visit www.educationusa.be.

Name: _____

Personal Statement Self-Evaluation

STEP 1: PERSONAL REFLECTION

Consider the following questions about yourself. Write down answers if you feel like it!

- What's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story?
- What details of your life (e.g., personal or family problems, history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help someone reading your application to better understand you?
- If you have worked a lot during your college years, what have you learned (leadership or managerial skills, for example), and how has that work contributed to your growth?
- What PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS (e.g., integrity, compassion, and/or persistence) do you possess that would improve your prospects for success in the field or profession? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?
- What SKILLS (e.g., leadership, communicative, analytical) do you possess?

STEP 2: PROFESSIONAL REFLECTION

If you are writing this personal statement as part of an application for a particular program, job, etc., consider the following questions about your academic/professional motivations.

- Why are you applying (to this scholarship, program, position, etc.)?
- What do you hope to get out of this experience?
- What are your long-term goals and how will this help you achieve them?
- How does your academic and professional experience make you a good candidate for this application?
- What would someone NOT know about you from looking at your CV?

STEP 3: SELF EVALUATION

Does the first sentence make you want to keep reading?	YES	NO
If you are writing in response to a prompt, does the personal statement respond to the specific questions asked?	YES	NO
Do you avoid spelling/grammar mistakes?	YES	NO
Do you know the meaning of every word you use in your personal statement? (Remember, we want to avoid unnecessarily large words!)	YES	NO
Do you avoid inappropriate topics (e.g., controversial political issues, personal stories from your childhood)?	YES	NO
Does your personal statement tell a story?	YES	NO

Now swap personal statements with a classmate. Ask them to evaluate your personal statement for spelling/grammar mistakes, clarity, and interest – and tell them to be honest in their evaluation!

Name: _____

Telling an Effective Story

Brainstorm 2-3 examples that you could use when responding to the following prompt. Follow the worksheet to develop a strategy for creating a compelling narrative that effectively demonstrates positive characteristics about you: **“Using one or more examples, please describe a challenge at school, work, or in your personal life that you have had to overcome. How did you resolve the situation?”**

DESCRIPTION OF CHALLENGE:		
HOW WOULD YOU TURN THIS INTO A NARRATIVE, OR STORY?		
BEGINNING	MIDDLE	END
WHAT DOES THIS STORY DEMONSTRATE ABOUT YOU?		

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BEGINNING	MIDDLE	END
WHAT DOES THIS STORY DEMONSTRATE ABOUT YOU?		

THE LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation letters are more important in the college admissions process than many students realize. Just ask Alice Huang, Senior Assistant Director of Admission and Director of Engineering Recruitment at Columbia University! She told EducationUSA: “I have learned that amidst all the information one can garner from reading a candidate’s secondary school transcript, short responses, application essay, and list of achievements and activities, what often pulls the entire picture together are letters from counselors and teachers. This is because, at the end of the day, the letters provide evidence that a student’s achievements make an impact upon the outside world.”

CHOOSING YOUR RECOMMENDERS

A great recommendation letter is written by someone who knows you well. Do not choose a recommender to whom you are just a grade on a paper. Your recommender should be able to speak to your character, personal motivations, and past challenges – not just your academic achievements!

If you are unsure that your recommender will be able to speak to these characteristics, consider providing them with some additional information, including:

- the universities to which you are applying (and the reasons why)
- your accomplishments so far and your plans and goals for the future
- your most meaningful and long-term commitments, in or outside of school
- personal issues (long commutes, after school jobs, family problems) that may have affected you over your secondary school years

When selecting your recommenders, look for a variety of teachers or employers who can speak to different aspects of your personality and achievements. Consider choosing teachers who have taught you in subjects that you found challenging but in which you worked hard to excel. Alternatively, it might also be a good idea to choose teachers who have taught you in the areas of study you would like to pursue in college. Above all, choose teachers who *like* and *respect* you.

Remember, you can also ask for a recommendation from another adult: for example, a coach, an employer, or an adviser who knows you well and could write a strong and positive letter.

REQUESTING A RECOMMENDATION

Remember to give recommenders plenty of time to write your letters! Make your request at least two months in advance, and then follow up with your recommender as the deadline approaches.

Be clear about the requirements. Make sure that the people writing your letters of recommendation know the *application deadline* (and hopefully plan to submit their recommendation well in advance) and *how* the letter must be submitted.

Be clear about your expectations. Most secondary school teachers in the United States have written many letters of recommendation and know what is expected; in contrast, this might be the first time that your teacher has written a letter of recommendation for a U.S. university! You should be prepared to explain to them what an American letter of recommendation looks like, what information it includes, and what kind of tone it expresses.

After the recommendations have been submitted, follow up with a (handwritten) thank you note.

Teaching Letters of Recommendation

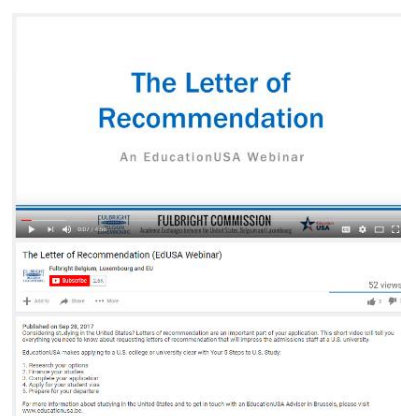
Another important aspect of academic and professional applications, letters of recommendation can be daunting to students who feel that their professors and supervisors do not know them well enough to write about them.

Suggested Class Activities

- **BRAINSTORMING ACTIVITY.** Ask students to brainstorm a list of professors, supervisors, and mentors for whom they could ask for a letter of recommendation for a professional or academic application. Students will fill out a worksheet detailing the information that they think this recommender could provide about them (included).
- **RECOMMENDATION REQUEST.** Ask students to prepare a request for a letter of recommendation that they could send to a professor or supervisor. This letter should be polite and should address the reasons why the student has decided to ask this particular person, the student's motivations in applying to the program, and any pertinent logistical information (e.g., application deadline).
- **COMPARE/CONTRAST AMERICAN & BRITISH LETTERS.** Using resources available online, find 2-3 examples of stereotypical letters of recommendation from the United States and from the United Kingdom. Ask students to identify differences in the structure and tone of the letters. Based on these letters, ask students to brainstorm about cultural differences between these two English-speaking countries.

Additional Resources

- This article from *The Balance* provides a great summary of different types of recommendation letters, including downloadable templates. Visit www.thebalance.com/letter-of-recommendation-tips-and-examples-2062979 for more information.
- Want to learn more about crafting the perfect personal statement or asking for letters of recommendation? Our YouTube Channel has a five-minute webinar with everything you need to know! Visit www.youtube.com/fulbrightbe to watch this and other webinars on a variety of topics. Students may also benefit from watching interviews with alumni of the SUSI Program, who speak about their time in the United States and the impact that it has had on their personal and professional development.



Name: _____

Selecting My Recommenders

When requesting a letter of recommendation, look for a variety of teachers or employers who can speak to different aspects of your personality and achievements. It might be helpful to write down the top three things that you think each recommender can say about you – for example, that you are a team player who works well with others, or that you are a hardworking student who does not back down from a challenge!

Name: _____ Relationship: _____

This recommender can speak to...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Name: _____ Relationship: _____

This recommender can speak to...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Name: _____ Relationship: _____

This recommender can speak to...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Name: _____ Relationship: _____

This recommender can speak to...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____