

JK Application Tips Webinar

Slide 1 (Zach): Welcome to Watson

Welcome to the Watson Fellowship Application Tip session.

Slide 2

My name is Zach Bubolo, and I'm the director of operations at the Watson Foundation. I'm joined today by Sasha Bur-shtain, our program manager at the Foundation.

(Sasha):

In case you did not have the opportunity to join one of our previous general info sessions, we'll start today with a quick overview of the eligibility requirements for the fellowship, the features of our program, and our selection criteria. Then we'll spend most of our time providing you tips on how to complete the application, including sample answers to our three essay questions.

Slide 3: (Sasha): Watson Campus Advisor

After this session, if you are interested in applying to the fellowship and you have not yet been given access to our application, or, if you have questions about Watson Fellowship eligibility and features, and whether this is the right opportunity for you, we encourage you to reach out to the Watson Campus Advisor at your college. Your Watson Advisor is the person on your campus who knows the most about the fellowship. They will send you a link to our application and help you throughout the application process. We have listed all of your Watson Campus Advisors on this screen with their email addresses. (Slide 4) You can also find your Watson Advisor's contact information by checking our website's partner page and clicking on your college logo.

Slide 5 (Zach): Eligibility

OK, let's review eligibility: To apply for the Watson Fellowship, you must be a freshman or sophomore with at least 4 semesters remaining, be a U.S. citizen or green card holder, and be no older than 21 years old on Feb 14, 2024.

If you are a liberal arts, science, or business student, or if you have not yet declared a major, and you're excited to try different careers and types of work, then Watson would be an excellent opportunity for you to expand your personal, professional and cultural

potential. Even premed and prelaw students are great candidates for Watson because they have the freedom to engage in a variety of majors at school and different types of work experiences during the summers-- experiences that could prepare them for medical or law school or any other career they discover through the fellowship. Because Watson is for students who are open to exploring various paths, if you are already training for a specific career in school, such as nursing, speech pathology or pharmacy, then the Watson program may not be the program best suited for you. If you have any questions about whether the fellowship is appropriate for you, please speak with your Watson Campus Advisor.

Slide 6 (Sasha): What is Watson

The Watson Fellowship has 7 main components that take place over the course of 2 1/2 years.

Slide 7 (Sasha): Internships

First, there are Watson's three paid summer internships. Fellows work in person, remotely or through hybrid arrangements based on your preferences, the preferences of the organization and public health considerations.

In your first summer, you'll work 8 weeks in NYC at a Watson partner organization and earn \$7,500. You are matched with an organization based on your interests and the skills you want to develop.

In the second and third summers, you may leave NYC for 10 weeks and work throughout the U.S. or abroad based on your interests. At least one of these summers must be spent abroad. You will earn \$9000 in your 2nd summer and \$10000 in your 3rd summer plus roundtrip airfare to get to the city you want to work in.

In your second and third summers you also have the opportunity to self-initiate.

Slide 8 (Sasha): What is Self- initiate?

Self-initiate means you can identify an organization you have a specific interest in anywhere in the world and use your Watson funding to go there and intern during the summer. This is Aisatou, a fellow that recently completed her Watson. During her fellowship, she had an interest in poverty alleviation and economic empowerment. She researched organizations, contacted them with Watson's help, and landed internships in her second and third Watson summers.

Slide 9 (Sasha):

In her second Watson summer, she traveled to Bangladesh and interned with the Grameen Bank, an organization that alleviates poverty by providing micro-loans for education and small entrepreneurial ventures.

Slide 10 (Sasha):

In her third summer, she self-initiated with Barefoot College in Zanzibar, an organization that makes vocational and educational opportunities accessible to women and girls in rural and marginalized communities.

Other fellows have self-initiated with environmental groups, congressional offices, research labs, advertising agencies, museums, human rights institutes, and countless other organizations they identified based on their own personal and professional interests.

Slide 11 (Zach): Discovery Fund

In addition to paid internships, Watson also provides a \$2000 Discovery Fund to each fellow to take special initiative in exploring a new career path or interest. You can propose research, fieldwork, conferences, and independent projects to further your personal and professional development. (Slide 12) Two of our fellows used their Discovery Fund to create a podcast for Lady Gaga's Born This Way Foundation about how youth overcame anxiety during the pandemic. (Slide 13) Amanda explored her interest in journalism and went to Greece during her winter break to write articles for her school newspaper about the refugee crisis. After graduation, she worked in journalism at an arts magazine. (Slide 14) And Hamida also went to Greece to research how the Mediterranean diet impacts health. She works as a Chronic Disease Advisor for the health department now.

Slide 15 (Sasha): Additional Fellowship Features

In addition to paid internships and your Discovery Fund experience, you'll participate in Friday afternoon interactive seminars during the summer and five weekend seminars during the term time to help you reflect on your fellowship experiences and plan your future; you'll attend cultural events with your fellow fellows like concerts, plays, sporting events and cooking classes; you'll correspond with a Watson journal reader

during the summer who will support your personal and professional growth; and you'll benefit from guided personalized mentorship.

Throughout the fellowship, you'll be learning alongside 14 other ambitious students in your Watson cohort, each with unique ideas and interests. As a cohort, you will become each other's strongest support and network.

Slide 16: (Zach) The application

Ok, let's jump into the application.

For the Watson application, you'll need to upload a Resume, Transcript, and a Photo of yourself. If you don't have a resume or need help updating yours, you can visit your campus career center. We ask to see your current transcript, but we do not have a minimum GPA requirement to apply to the fellowship. We just want to see that you are keeping up with your academic work, so that the fellowship does not become a burden to you. Lastly, you'll need to submit a headshot. Here are some good examples. If you are selected for the fellowship, we'll want to put your photo on our website, so send us a good one!

You'll also need to submit your contact information, a list of extracurricular activities, languages you speak and your intended major. As we mentioned, undecided majors are welcome to apply.

Slide 17: (Zach)

To apply for the Watson Fellowship, you'll submit two recommendations. One of your recommenders should be a professor from your college. If there are any first year students who have not had the chance to establish a relationship with a college professor yet, you may ask a teacher from your senior year of high school. Your other recommender can be another professor or someone else who knows you well like an advisor, supervisor from a job, or coach. Family or friends should not be recommenders.

When you enter your recommender's contact information in your Watson application, they will automatically be sent a link to a form with several questions they will have to answer on your behalf.

Slide 18 (Zach): Recommendation Tips

Here are a few tips about recommendations:

- (1) It's always a good idea to ask a person if they would provide a strong recommendation for you before you enter their name on the application.
- (2) If they agree, be sure to tell them they will be receiving a link to a form with specific questions on it and that they will NOT be asked to submit a general recommendation letter.
- (3) Be sure to supply your recommenders with information about the fellowship. For instance, you can give them a link to the Jeannette K. Watson Fellowship homepage and point out our selection criteria.
- (4) You should also schedule a time to talk with your recommenders about your accomplishments and why you think you would be a good candidate for the fellowship before they begin to write your recommendation.
- (5) Tell them your campus' deadline for their recommendation. We'll show you all of the school's deadlines at the end of this session.

If you need any help completing your application or deciding on who should be your recommenders, please ask your Watson Campus Advisor. They are excited to help you throughout the application process.

You'll also need to complete three short essays which we'll review now.

Slide 19 (Zach): Time to think

Before you begin writing, we encourage you to take time to think deeply about yourself, your current interests and how you demonstrate the qualities of a Watson Fellow reflected in our selection criteria.

We reviewed our selection criteria during our general info session, but we're going to do it again now because it is so important that you understand what we are looking for before you start your application. Sasha, can you explain our nine selection criteria?

Slide 20 (Sasha): What we look for.

Sure. There are 9 selection criteria for the Watson Fellowship starting with high standards.

CLICK ([Sasha](#))

High standards refers to excellence in your performance and communication skills, flexibility and your ability to follow through on assignments and plans.

CLICK ([Sasha](#)): Ambition

Next is ambition - your drive to pursue expansive personal, professional and cultural experiences and seek out knowledge about things that interest you.

CLICK ([Sasha](#)): Openness

Openness to new ideas and points of view. Open to self-inquiry.

CLICK ([Sasha](#)): Desire to explore diverse cultures and new professional fields

Desire to explore diverse cultures and new professional fields

CLICK ([Sasha](#)): Willingness to act on feedback

Willingness to incorporate feedback

CLICK ([Sasha](#)): Leadership

Leadership: Ability to assess a situation, develop an approach and build a sustainable solution.

CLICK ([Sasha](#)): Ability to work in groups

Teamwork, your ability to work in groups and demonstrate inclusivity.

CLICK ([Sasha](#)): Integrity & accountability

Integrity & accountability: Strong character, accountability to yourself and others; commitment to positive social change.

CLICK ([Sasha](#)): Strong academic record

And lastly, strong academic record. There is no GPA minimum for the Watson Fellowship, however fellows should have a solid footing in their academic pursuits.

Slide 21 (Sasha): Definitions on website

We have included detailed definitions of our selection criteria on our website in the FAQ section. We urge you to review them as you complete your application. Remember that these are the qualities we are looking for in Watson fellowship candidates. I'll pass it back to Zach to review our first essay.

Slide 22 (Zach): ESSAY 1

Thanks Sasha.

Our first essay reads:

You are surrounded by remarkable campus leaders. Have a conversation with one of them (a professor or staff advisor) about a meaningful idea or interest related to your future. In your essay:

- describe the idea or interest
- share a new perspective you learned from the conversation
- explain the next step(s) you might take and why

In your essay, include the leader's name and title. We recommend sharing this essay question and your idea or interest ahead of time so your campus leader can prepare for the conversation. Word count: 200

For this essay, we ask that you talk to someone on your campus— a professor, advisor, staff member, mentor. Someone you would want to spend some time with to talk about your interests and your future. Think about who you might approach for this. Did you take a class with a professor who impressed you? Have you heard about a professor you have an interest in meeting - maybe someone you're considering taking a class with next semester. Are you in a club? Is there a club advisor from the college who you have connected with or would like to meet with? Have you met the director of your campus career center yet or your school's fellowship advisor? These are people who often talk to students about their future? What about your academic advisor - would this be a good time to get to know each other better?

Watson Fellows use their resources to further their growth. At first, reaching out to someone may feel hard to do - but if you tell the person the purpose of the meeting - that you are applying for a fellowship that could provide you tremendous opportunities

to work and travel over the next three years, they may be excited to be part of that process. If you're stumped and can't think of someone to talk to, ask your Watson Campus Advisor for advice. They can help you brainstorm ideas of who to talk to.

Even if you don't have a specific idea about your future - that's ok - you can talk about some interests you have and where they might lead. The goal is to come away with some new ideas or advice that you can act on.

Slide 23 (Zach): ESSAY 1 Tips

Here are a few tips when completing this essay:

- Brainstorm with your Watson Campus Advisor about who you should meet with.
- Request a meeting in person if possible. Ask them to set aside 45 minutes.
- Tell them about the fellowship, you can send them a link to our website.
- Send them a copy of the essay prompt prior to the meeting so they know what the conversation will be about.
- Be sure to leave the meeting with some new ideas, advice or insights you can act on and write about in your essay.
- If the first meeting doesn't yield the results you were hoping for, try again.
- Be sure to tell us the name and position of the person you spoke to in the essay.

Note that there is a 200 word limit on this essay. So it's rather short. You'll want to be concise but make sure you answer all parts of the question.

Sasha, can you read a sample reply to this essay prompt?

SLIDE 24 (Sasha): Essay 1 response

Sure Zach.

Let's read Jason's essay reply:

To discuss my interest in creative writing, I met with my English professor from last semester, Dr. Jeff Holmes. I've wanted to study creative writing since high school

and have been writing short stories since I was ten years old. We talked about how to prioritize time to write and expand my breadth of topics. He spoke about “creative nonfiction,” a genre of writing I hadn’t heard of before but that I’m interested in exploring, perhaps as I write about my own life growing up on a farm in upstate New York and the political polarization happening in my community and in others across the country. We also spoke about the value of writing opinion pieces for magazines and newspapers and how to find new and different topics to write about by finding new inspiration. I now have three goals for the spring semester to find inspiration: First: Read “Invisible Man, Got the Whole World Watching: A Young Black Man's Education” by Mychal Denzel Smith, a professor who teaches creative writing at Hunter College. Second: Meet with Professor Smith to talk about his career. Third: Take a free course with the Op-Ed Project called: “Write to Change the World”.

SLIDE 25 (Zach): Good features of essay 1

That was a great reply. In it, Jason told us:

- who he spoke to
- what his interests are
- new things he learned during his conversation with his professor
- and the specific things he is planning to do next

SLIDE 26 (Zach): What we look for

The reply also demonstrated several qualities we look for in a Watson Fellow including:

- high standards in his writing skills and follow thru on the assignment
- open-mindedness and an interest to learn about new paths like creative nonfiction and Op-Eds
- ambition to seek out more knowledge about his interests
- and an ability and willingness to act on the information he received

I think Jason did a great job. His writing was clear and error free and he addressed each aspect of the essay prompt with specific details.

Let’s move on now.

Sasha, would you read the next essay prompt:

SLIDE 27 (Sasha): Essay 2

Sure Zach. Our second essay reads:

Describe a significant event from the last year, that you led or deeply participated in, that did not go well. Provide yourself with constructive feedback and share what you would do differently.

Word count: 200

SLIDE 28 (Sasha): Essay 2 response

Here's Jason's reply to the second essay:

"Leave and come back when you can take this seriously." Hearing these words from the director of my new college's choral ensemble was devastating because they referred to a passion for singing that has played a significant role in my development and life. As someone with a background in choral performance, I assumed I could take on the musical challenges of this new group because of my past experience, but that was my first mistake—being overconfident. At our first rehearsal, I had not rehearsed the music because I assumed I could "wing" it. My lack of preparation was obvious and immediately raised questions about my commitment to the group, and capabilities as a musician. This rehearsal served as a rude awakening for me and forced me to understand the significant gap between high school and college expectations. My confidence served as a hindrance, rather than a catalyst because I used it as an excuse not to rehearse instead of a motivator. For the next rehearsal, I held myself accountable to my group, improved my time management and practiced my craft so it properly reflected my skills and the passion I have for performing.

(Word count 194)

SLIDE 29 (Zach): Good features of essay 2

That was another great reply. It gave us an example of something Jason was engaged in that was meaningful to him but that didn't go well. He also described what he learned from the experience and how he did things differently the next time. Had he not had that opportunity we would have still wanted to hear what he would have done differently if something similar happened again in the future.

SLIDE 30 (Zach): What we look for

The reply also demonstrated several qualities that we look for in a Watson Fellow including:

- High standards in his performance the second time he had the opportunity to rehearse with the group

- Ability to act on feedback
- Teamwork and accountability to himself and his team

Let's move on to our third essay Sasha.

SLIDE 31 (Sasha): Essay 3

Great, here we go:

In addition to working with Watson internship partners, the Watson Fellowship includes the ability to self-initiate an internship with an organization you identify or use your Discovery Fund to create an independent project or experience based on your interests. Imagine a self-initiated internship or Discovery Fund experience that takes you well out of your comfort zone exploring an unfamiliar culture or new professional field. Explain why you picked this internship or experience and the impact you hope it has on your personal and professional growth.

Word count: 200

SLIDE 32(Sasha): Before you begin writing, your first step is to think about your interests broadly. These are just a sample of questions that are useful to help you brainstorm a big list of possibilities for yourself:

- What do you read about in the news?
- What topics do you talk about with your friends?
- What have you learned about in school that has really interested you?
- What social issue are you invested in?
- Do you have a hobby or extracurricular activity that is meaningful to you?
- Is there a career you have thought a lot about that excites you?
- Have you heard someone speak about a topic that has inspired you?
- Is there an issue personal to you that you would like to explore further?
- Are there people in the public eye that you admire? Why? What impact do they have?

SLIDE 33 (Zach): Here are Jason's answers to these questions. You can see there are many different interests on this grid, from politics to storytelling to environmental justice.

When selecting which interest to choose for this essay, consider:

- Which one of your interests is most exciting/compelling to you?
- Which one do you know a lot about?
- Which one are you really curious to learn more about?
- If you had a chance, which one would you want to work on if you had an internship or the opportunity to craft a Discovery Fund experience?

SLIDE 34 (Zach): Let's say Jason's top interests right now are green design in urban planning, architecture and photography. In this essay, he has the option to either tell us about an organization he would self-initiate an internship at anywhere in the world, or create a Discovery Fund experience, like the ones we described earlier in the presentation. In this case Jason decides he wants to create a Discovery Fund experience to explore his interests. This is the essay response he submits:

SLIDE 35 (Zach): Essay 3 response

As I became interested in landscape architecture and biophilic design, Singapore became a dream destination for inspiration and research. Singapore, known as the "City in Nature," is an incredible example of biophilic urbanism, where nature is an intrinsic part of urban planning and design. For school, I conducted research analyzing the importance of nature within the built environment and as I was looking into Singapore's philosophy of designing with nature in mind, I saw how strongly it paralleled all I argued for so fervently in my paper. For my Discovery Fund project, I will travel to Singapore, photographically document examples of successful landscape architecture and green design, and research the benefits of such in this real-world example. I also plan to meet people including architects at Henning Larsen, officials at Singapore's National Parks Board, and Yun Hye Hwang of the National University of Singapore who have led the way in creating the biodiverse garden-filled city that Singapore is today. This experience will expose me to the pioneering actions taking place in Singapore to create a more biodiverse city and nation, and how other major cities can adopt similar initiatives as I plan my own future as a leading landscape architect.

(Word count: 200)

SLIDE 36 (Sasha):

That was a great reply. It included Jason's interests and motivation to explore them, where he wanted to go, specific things he wanted to do, people he wanted to meet, and what impact the experience would have on him. It was well thought out and reflected high standards, ambition and a desire to explore a new culture, and professional field.

SLIDE 37 (Sasha):

Instead of a Discovery Fund experience, if you decided to write about an internship you would self initiate, we would suggest that you select an organization that is not widely known - like the UN or World Health Organization. That's because we see this as a chance for you to demonstrate your research skills to find an organization doing work in an area that interests you.

Also, consider picking an organization that is outside NYC or abroad. Your choice of location tells us where you might see yourself going in your second or third Watson summer. Take this opportunity to demonstrate your ambition and interest in diverse cultures.

Let's look at an essay written by a student who decides he wants to write about an organization he would self-initiate at rather than a Discovery Fund experience.

Nelson Mandela said, "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." I have long been inspired by Mandela's words as I believe education is a tool that can foster peace, create opportunity, and promote economic growth. To further my interest in promoting access to education, I would be excited to self-initiate a summer internship with the SaGG Foundation (Sponsor a Gambian Girl). SaGG is an education movement that aims to champion the cause of girl's education in The Gambia, a small West African country. As a teaching intern at SaGG, I would bring my experience as a high school and college-level tutor, writer for my school newspaper, and leader of my school's Speech and Debate Team where I train students in their communication skills. I have been considering applying to a Fulbright scholarship when I graduate where I would teach English overseas for a year. An internship at SaGG would broaden my perspective of international education, further develop my teaching skills, and help me develop confidence while navigating an unfamiliar culture. While abroad, given my love of nature, as a bonus I would also hope to visit one of nearby Senegal's amazing national parks. (Word count: 200)

SLIDE 38 (Sasha):

In this response we learn that the student is interested in access to education and has researched organizations that reflect that interest. The organization selected was in The Gambia, which spoke to the student's desire to explore diverse cultures; and ambition was reflected in the student's goal to pursue a Fulbright grant, a competitive grant awarded to students interested in teaching or conducting research abroad. Overall it was a strong response to our third essay prompt

Zach, can we review how to apply to the fellowship now?

Slide 39: (Zach) How to apply

The first step in applying is to contact your Watson Campus Advisor. (Slide 40) As we mentioned, every Watson partner school has a campus advisor who can give interested students access to our online application and help them throughout the application and interview process. These are your Watson Campus Advisors. You can also find your advisor's contact information on the Partners page of our website. (Slide 41)

(Slide 42) Select your recommenders and enter them on the application so we can send them a link to the recommendation form. Don't be shy about bouncing ideas off your Watson Campus Advisor about who you should select as your recommenders.

(Slide 43) Complete your application by your school's deadline. Each campus has their own deadline. Here are the deadlines for all of our partner schools. (Slide 44) Find your school on this list and make a note of the deadline that your application must be completed by. This will give your Watson Campus Advisor enough time to review all completed applications and determine your school's four nominees. Remember to Save often while completing your application. We would suggest completing your essays offline and then uploading them so you're sure not to lose anything you're working on.

After you submit your application to your campus advisor, they will review it. They may want to speak with you further at that time. Then they will decide on their 4 nominations.

(Slide 45) If you are nominated by your school, submit your application by no later than Feb 14, 2024 noon. Your Watson campus advisor will help you prepare for your Watson interview. Interviews with Watson will be conducted February 21 and March 6.

Slide 46: (Sasha): Questions

This concludes our presentation. Thank you for joining us. We wish everyone a lot of luck in their school year and pursuing your own personal path, hopefully through the Watson Fellowship. We look forward to reading your applications and getting to know you better.

