

”NSF has funded more than 60,000 graduate fellowships dating back to 1952.” - [USC Press](#)

I was a successful first-time applicant in [2023](#) (the first-year of my PhD).

1 My Application

My essays and reviews:

- [Personal Statement](#)
- [Research Proposal](#)
- [Reviews](#)

Some stand-out aspects of my personal statement writing:

1. [My personal statement introduction](#) (the most edited paragraph in the entire application)
2. Intellectual Merit in a sandwich format (paragraph on current work, past work in chronological order, paragraph on current work) instead of all paragraphs in chronological order
3. Broader impacts as a proposed initiative while weaving in how my past experiences help me to carry it out instead of describing only my past broader impacts initiatives

My letters of recommendation:

1. PhD advisor (addresses Intellectual Merit)
2. PI in undergrad (addresses Intellectual Merit)
3. Professor for whom I took two classes and served as a TA in the last semester of undergrad (addresses Broader Impacts)

Two-word advice: Start Early

- I estimate the time I spent on the application was equal to a 4-unit undergrad technical course with finals between late Sept to early Oct

More successful examples hosted by Alex Lang [here](#)!