

Tips for Scholarship Applications and Personal Essays*

Getting Started

Before you start filling out your scholarship applications, you need to spend some time thinking about how to write a scholarship essay that will get the results that you want. For many students, the hardest part of writing a scholarship essay is getting comfortable with highlighting your accomplishments. Students often see this as *bragging* about themselves. But this is exactly what you need to do in order to convince the judges that you should receive the scholarship instead of the other applicants, you have to tell the judges what makes you a better candidate.

Therefore, one of the most important things you have to do when getting ready to write your college scholarship essays is to spend some time reflecting on just how wonderful you really are. When you write down all of the great things you have accomplished, it will be much easier for you to create an essay that conveys your strong points to the judges.

Tips for getting ready to write a strong essay:

1. Make a list of all your accomplishments.
2. Develop a list of your extracurricular activities.
3. Write down the three accomplishments of which you are the most proud.
4. Think of a problem that you have faced and write down how you were able to overcome it.
5. Put in writing your career goals, or your reason for wanting to attend college.
6. Pretend that you had to write a letter of recommendation for yourself. Write down the three most important things you would say.

Armed with this list of your best traits, accomplishments, and goals, you're on your way to writing a winning essay. Of course, you have to make sure that your essay is well written, on-topic, sounds sincere, and is free of typographical errors. No matter what you end up saying about yourself, be sure to proofread it very carefully. It's always a great idea to have someone else double check for spelling, grammar, and mechanical errors. **Do not wait until the last minute to write your essay!**

Read the Instructions!!!!!!

This is the first mistake that students make - *they don't "read the instructions"*. Don't let this happen to you!

- Do you qualify for the scholarship? Do you meet the criteria?
- What is the deadline and what do you need to submit? i.e. essay, letters of recommendation, transcripts, etc.
- Are there any limits on the essay? i.e. words, fonts, spacing, pages, etc.

Example Scholarship Essay Questions

- Describe one specific example of your leadership ability
- Describe why you wish to obtain a college education and why you are deserving of a scholarship
- Describe what influenced your decision to pursue Engineering as a career
- What personal information do you wish to share with the scholarship selection committees?

The Essay

Get to the point! Your essay should be easy to read. Write what you know. Your voice will come through if the essay is about something you know, love or care about. Here are suggestions for organizing your essay in 4 simple paragraphs:

First Paragraph

This is your introduction. *Make it good!* You want to capture the reader's attention from the start. Start with who you are, what your major is, and what your career goals are – *keep it simple*. End with what makes you the *best* candidate for the scholarship – this is one sentence that will lead into the second paragraph. For example, “I believe that I am the best candidate for this scholarship because (*you complete this sentence*)”.

Second Paragraph

Why are you the best candidate? What have you done so far? This is where you begin to support your case. Why did you choose to attend college? How did you choose your major? What are your positive qualities, accomplishments, work experience, internships, volunteer work, leadership experience, extracurricular activities, personal problems you have overcome, etc.? Let the scholarship committee know that your goal is realistic, and that you are well on your way to achieving your goals.

Third Paragraph

What are your future plans? Be specific about your plans for pursuing your goals. Where do you plan to transfer? What is the highest degree that you plan to achieve? i.e. Bachelors, Masters, Ph.D. How do you plan to use your education to achieve career goals?

Fourth Paragraph

Make sure your conclusion brings it all together. Begin by restating what makes you the best candidate for the scholarship – *this is a simple one or two sentence summary of the key points from paragraphs 2 and 3*. Then explain how you will benefit from the scholarship - *how will the scholarship help you to continue towards achieving your goals?* Finally, thank the scholarship committee for the opportunity to be considered for the scholarship.

Who to ask to write a letter of recommendation

Letters of recommendation are not popularity contests – they are an important part of the application process. Ask someone who knows you well and can write intelligently about you and your academic achievements. Professor, Counselors, advisors, coaches and religious leaders are all good sources for recommendations. However, be sure that the person you ask has the ability to write a good letter, and **give them enough time to get it completed by the deadline.**

*References:

- “Suggested Items Needed on your Personal Essay for Scholarship Applications” – provided by City College Scholarships Office
- Scholarship tips from Life Tips (scholarship.lifetips.com)