Tips for Scholarship Essays

Revised from: http://www.quintcareers.com/collegegate3.html

1. **Answer the Question**
2. **Be Original**
3. **Be Yourself**
4. **Don't "Thesaurize" your Composition**
5. **Use Imagery and Clear, Vivid**
6. **Spend the Most Time on your Body**
7. **Paragraphs Must Relate to Introduction**
8. **Use Transitions**
9. **Conclusions are Crucial**
10. **Proofread**

1. **Answer the Question –**
   You can follow the next steps, but if you miss the question, you will not win the scholarship.

2. **Be Original –**
   Even seemingly boring essay topics can sound interesting if creatively approached. If writing about a gymnastics competition you trained for, do not start your essay: "I worked long hours for many weeks to train for XXX competition." Consider an opening like, "Every morning I awoke at 5:00 to sweat, tears, and blood as I trained on the uneven bars hoping to bring the state gymnastics trophy to my hometown."

3. **Be Yourself –**
   The scholarship committee wants to learn about you and your writing ability. Write about something meaningful and describe your feelings, not necessarily your actions. If you do this, your essay will be unique. Many people travel to foreign countries or win competitions, but your feelings during these events are unique to you. Unless a philosophy or societal problem has interested you intensely for years, stay away from grand themes that you have little personal experience with.

4. **Don't "Thesaurize" your Composition –**
   For some reason, students continue to think big words make good essays. Big words are fine, but only if they are used in the appropriate contexts with complex styles. Think Hemingway.

5. **Use Imagery and Clear, Vivid Prose –**
   If you are not adept with imagery, you can write an excellent essay without it, but it's not easy. The application essay lends itself to imagery since the entire essay requires your experiences as supporting details. Appeal to the five senses of the scholarship officers.

6. **Spend the Most Time on your Introduction –**
   Expect scholarship officers to spend 1-2 minutes reading your essay. You must use your introduction to grab their interest from the beginning. You might even consider completely changing your introduction after writing your body paragraphs.
   a. Don't Summarize in your Introduction. Ask yourself why a reader would want to read your entire essay after reading your introduction. If you summarize, the scholarship officer need not read the rest of your essay.
   b. Create Mystery or Intrigue in your Introduction. It is not necessary or recommended that your first sentence give away the subject matter. Raise questions in the minds of the scholarship officers to force them to read on. Appeal to their emotions to make them relate to your subject matter.

7. **Body Paragraphs Must Relate to Introduction –**
   Your introduction can be original, but cannot be silly. The paragraphs that follow must relate to your introduction.

8. **Use Transitions –**
   Applicants continue to ignore transition to their own detriment. You must use transition within paragraphs and especially between paragraphs to preserve the logical flow of your essay. Transition is not limited to phrases like "as a result, in addition, while . . . , since . . . , etc." but includes repeating key words and progressing the idea. Transition provides the intellectual architecture to argument building.

9. **Conclusions are Crucial –**
The conclusion is your last chance to persuade the reader or impress upon them your qualifications. In the conclusion, avoid summary since the essay is rather short to begin with; the reader should not need to be reminded of what you wrote 300 words before. Also do not use stock phrases like "in conclusion, in summary, to conclude, etc." You should consider the following conclusions:
    a. Expand upon the broader implications of your discussion.
    b. Consider linking your conclusion to your introduction to establish a sense of balance by reiterating introductory phrases.
    c. Redefine a term used previously in your body paragraphs.
    d. End with a famous quote that is relevant to your argument. Do not try to do this, as this approach is overdone. This should come naturally.
    e. Frame your discussion within a larger context or show that your topic has widespread appeal.
    f. Remember, your essay need not be so tidy that you can answer why your little sister died or why people starve in Africa; you are not writing a "sit-com," but should forge some attempt at closure.

10. **Proofread.**

Give your Draft to Others.

Ask editors to read with these questions in mind:

What is the essay about?

Have I used active voice verbs wherever possible?

Do you detect any cliches?

Is my sentence structure varied or do I use all long or all short sentences?

Do I use transition appropriately?

Do I use imagery often and does this make the essay clearer and more vivid?

What's the best part of the essay?

What about the essay is memorable?

What's the worst part of the essay?

What parts of the essay need elaboration or are unclear?

What parts of the essay do not support your main argument or are immaterial to your case?

Is every single sentence crucial to the essay? This MUST be the case.

What does the essay reveal about your personality?

Could anyone else have written this essay?

How would you fill in the following blank based on the essay: "I want to accept you to this college/give you this scholarship because our college needs more _____."

How to Write a Great Scholarship Application Essay

Advice from a College Professor

Published March 09, 2009 by: Elaine Henninger

http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/1537025/how_to_write_a_great_scholarship_application_pg2.html?cat=4

Writing an essay to try to earn a scholarship? As a college professor who sits on several scholarship committees, I have some advice for you. After reading at least 100 scholarship essays, I'll tell you about the ones that stood out- and the ones that… didn't.

Have a plan.

I have read many essays where students write about how they would like to change the world by helping abused children or something of that nature. I always think those students sound like nice, caring people. However, the essays that strike me are the ones where someone has a plan. I read an essay by a student who wanted to prevent elder abuse by implementing a program that would help to educate caregivers of older adults with dementia. She felt that if people understood more about older adults with dementia, they would be less frustrated by their behaviors and less likely to abuse them. I advocated for giving that young woman a scholarship. She had a vision-rather than some vague thought about making the world a better place. If you want to start your own business, write about what type of business you would start and why it will work. No one's going to hold you to your plan, but show that you've put some thought toward it.

Address the questions.

I sit on a committee for a scholarship that is intended for promising students. The question asked on the application is simply: "Why are you a promising student that deserves this scholarship?" You would be surprised how many applicants do not answer that question. Sometimes there is no specific question to answer, but applicants are asked to write a statement that supports their application. In this case, consider who the scholarship is intended for. Is it for women in leadership? If so, describe why you are a leader and your future plans to lead (it is probably unnecessary to describe why you are a woman). Is it for students who have achieved despite adversity? If so, describe the obstacles you've overcome to become a successful student.

Start strong.

A ho-hum first sentence makes me glance over the rest of the essay with low expectations. A strong first sentence draws my interest, which is important if your essay happens to be the 25th essay I've read that evening. Here is an example of a weak start: "I've always worked hard in school and gotten good grades despite working 20 hours a week." Here's a strong start: "I'm exhausted when I get home at midnight from my job at the grocery store, but I sit down and look over those geometry notes one last time."

Use examples.

Many applicants list of their best qualities: "I'm detail-oriented, organized, and conscientious." This may be true, but it's not very interesting to me. Can you come up with examples of times when you were detail-oriented, organized, and conscientious? If you have trouble with this, ask a friend, family member, or teacher. Once I read an essay from an applicant who claimed he had very high expectations for himself, and he was determined to live up to those expectations. He explained that he played basketball in high school and needed to make 25 straight free throws in the driveway before he could go to bed every night. A little obsessive, perhaps, but he had me more convinced.

Edit.

Most scholarships are not decided on grammar, but if your poor writing distracts the readers from your actual response, you're in trouble. If you are not a strong writer, have someone else (who is a strong writer) take a look at your essay. In fact, have several people edit it for you. An essay that has not been carefully proofread tells a committee that this scholarship is not really that important to you---after all, it wasn't even worth taking the time to edit the essay.

How to Get a Great Letter of Recommendation

Advice from a College Professor

Published March 09, 2009 by: Elaine Henninger

http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/1536869/how_to_get_a_great_letter_of_recommendation.html?cat=31

In my position as a college professor, I write a lot of letters of recommendation. I write letters to help people get jobs, get into graduate school, and get scholarships. I will admit that some of these letters are stronger and more convincing than others. I'd like to share some tips on how to make that sure that the letters written on your behalf are as strong as they can be:

Ask the appropriate person.

I cannot write a strong letter of recommendation for someone who took my course, never spoke in class, and never visited my office. If the only thing I can write about you is the grade you received in my class, ask someone else. If a person doesn't know you, don't ask them to write a letter. In some cases, it's expected you will have an academic write a letter for you. Sometimes it's appropriate for a former employee to write a letter. But make sure that you ask people who know you well and also know you in a way that is relevant to what you are applying for. And, never ask someone who is related to you---even if they are only a distant relative.

Ask early.

I wouldn't ask my students to write a 2 page paper with one day's notice, so I advise that they don't ask me a day in advance to pull together a letter for them. I think two weeks is adequate notice, but more is better. Some people will forget to write the letter. I think it's wise to send a thank-you note to the letter writer about a week before the letter is due. It serves as a reminder if they've blown it off. And showing appreciation is always a good thing. Writing a good letter of recommendation takes time.

Provide details about yourself.

I find it much easier to write a letter that highlights a person's strengths if they provide me with a short resume or vitae. If a person is applying to a graduate program, I like to see the statement of purpose they've written. In addition, I like it when students provide me with a transcript where they've highlighting the courses they've taken from me and the grades they've earned in my classes. It's also nice if they remind me about any other ways in which they've worked with me. For instance, if you helped me organize a fundraiser for a student organization when you were a freshman, there's a possibility that may not come to mind when I sit down to write the letter. Give me all of this information in an organized way. If you put in the time to do this, you will be rewarded with a more convincing letter.

Provide details about what you are applying for.

I often have students who ask for letters of recommendation and give me very little information about what the letter is for. Even if students are applying for several graduate programs, I like to have information on each program so I can tailor the letters based on what the schools may be looking for. If I don't know anything about the programs, I send generic letters. If a student is applying for a job, I can highlight the skills needed for that position if the student brings me a copy of the job announcement. It is to your advantage to take some time to make sure I know the details of what you are applying. You don't want me to write a letter about your independent-mindedness if the job announcement mentions that they are seeking someone who is a team player.

In sum, there are many things you can do to improve your chances of getting great letters of recommendation. Make it easy for the letter writer! This may mean more time and effort on your part, but it is well worth it.