

Scholarship Essay Tips

Several of our scholarships require you to write an essay as part of the application process. Here are some helpful tips for writing a strong scholarship essay.

1. Do your homework: research the key stakeholders

Donors: Who contributed to the fund? What are their areas of interest? research? philanthropic?

Review Committee: This is your audience. Imagine you are writing them a letter.

Previous recipients: Who has been awarded the scholarship in the past?

Other students: Do you have any peers that have received scholarships?

Faculty: Do you need a letter of recommendation or insight into a specific content area?

2. What is the purpose of a scholarship essay?

To convince the reader(s) to give you \$\$\$ so the essay actually has a thesis:

“You should award this scholarship money to me because”... (avoid merely creating a list of how / why you meet the criteria). Instead write an essay that supports a unique thesis that qualifies you and gives the readers a sense of who you are as person and as an academic. Try to make them excited to give you money.

3. Who is the intended audience? Is it a review committee? Consider them when writing your essay.

Academics:

Administrators:

Committee Members: Community Members.

Professionals in a particular field:

4. What is the appropriate tone / style?

Imagine your essay as your voice and as your style of clothing / dress. How would you sound/look/dress if it was an in-person interview between you and the intended audience?

Formal-Professional/ Academic administration – Suit and Tie

Semi-Formal-student/academic – slacks/skirt/dress pants

Casual-friend – jeans and t-shirt

5. Form an outline

Structure your essay so that it tells a story in a linear, logical manner. This may, or may not be, a direct response to the prompt. Though it is very important to address all the requirements of the writing prompt, you should also try to do so in a creative way. Avoid making a bullet point list of your accomplishments.

6. Avoid Pitfalls:

Basic grammar / spelling errors, etc.

Not following directions.

Not responding to prompt or required format.

Not meeting basic criteria or addressing personal shortfalls: i.e. GPA, course requirement, etc.

Tone Problems: Writer comes across as inappropriate.

How to make tone adjustments:

Avoid sounding arrogant or bragging. Instead focus on being confident.

Avoid sounding insecure or begging. Instead try to be humble.

Avoid comments that may be taken as rude or offensive. Be mindful.

Avoid sounding selfish: me. me. me. Be inclusive: mention family, friends, and professors.

7. Get a second / third pair of eyes for editing.

Brief your reader(s) on the purpose of the essay.

Provide reader(s) with specific criteria requirements.

Share specific concerns that you have about the draft with your reader(s).

Most importantly, write an essay that you are proud of.