



THE COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP HANDBOOK

SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION

Crafting a winning scholarship application requires a strategic approach. Scholarships are awards by organizations with a specific goal in mind. Perhaps they want to encourage study in a certain field or encourage participation in a particular hobby. This means that for each scholarship you apply for you need to present yourself as the perfect applicant for the award by displaying how you meet the criteria. In each application you will end up presenting a different aspect of yourself and your personality.

Students with a chance at athletic scholarships usually are involved with recruiters, so it could be enough to focus on the athletic abilities and get coaches involved with making phone calls and/or writing recommendations. However, for an academic or science award you might need to focus on presenting your winning research project to a scholarship board. This will require some effort to tailor your efforts to the awarding organization.

Whatever the scholarship, the key is to determine what values and qualities the scholarship committee wants. They are looking for specific traits in the scholarship winners. Once you have determined this, construct every facet of your application (essay, recommendations, interview, etc.) to demonstrate how you meet these objectives.

HERE'S HOW THIS TASK WORKS

Tell Them What They Want To Hear... Honestly.

Politicians are notorious for telling their constituents what they want to hear, which can be a good or a bad thing! Good politicians do not lie, but they are skilled at putting a positive spin on their speeches, and tailoring it to the audience. We urge you to NEVER lie on an application, but take care to you present yourself and your work in the best possible way. Appeal to the interests of your audience, which will be the scholarship review board. Ask yourself the following questions about them:

- What is the mission of the organization giving the scholarship?
- Who is reading your application?
- Who is your competition?

Go For The Gusto... Quickly

Selection committees pore through so many applications that you need to grab their attention immediately, or risk getting placed at the bottom of the pile. This can be challenging, because often the space on the form is limited. Therefore, you need to feature your most impressive points first.

If you have listed four extracurricular activities, assume that some judges won't even read beyond the first two. This doesn't mean that all judges will be this lazy, but there are always some who are. Therefore, it's extremely important for you to prioritize the information that you present, and rank your accomplishments according to the following four criteria:

1. **Fit with scholarship organization's goal.** The most important factor in prioritizing your achievements is how they fit with the goal of the scholarship.
2. **Scope.** Prioritize your accomplishments by their scope, or how much of an impact they have made. Be sure that you spell out, briefly, details about this impact.
3. **Uniqueness.** Since your application will be compared to that of perhaps thousands of others, include accomplishments that are uncommon.
4. **Recentness.** This is the least important criterion, but if you get stuck, put the more recent achievements first.

Use Your Smarts

As you are completing your applications, keep in mind that while you may be applying for a public service scholarship you should also include at least a few academic achievements. For example, it does not hurt to list in a leadership scholarship application that you also came in second place at the county science fair – it shows that you are a multi-faceted individual. Also, make sure that you write actively and compellingly about your experiences.

Leadership Is Always Better Than Membership

If you've ever tried to motivate a group of peers to do anything without taking the easy way out (bribery), then you know that it takes courage, intelligence, and creativity to be a leader. Because of this, many scholarships give extra points to reward leadership. Regardless of the subject, scholarship judges want to know that the dollars will be awarded to someone who will not only make a difference in the future but who will also be a leader and motivate others to do so as well. Take charge of some elements in your activities, and don't hesitate to refer to it in your applications!

Extracurricular Activities and Hobbies

Scholarship organizations recognize the importance of a variety of activities, which is why so many scholarship applications include a section for extracurricular activities or hobbies. Award committees want to see evidence that you do more than read textbooks and take exams. Demonstrating a variety of interests – even better if they are a little out of the ordinary! – shows that you can transcend studying, and that you are a well-rounded person. Organizations love this kind of applicant...

Honors and Awards

Many applications will ask for a list of honors and awards, and this is a chance for you to throw modesty to the side and boast a bit! Be honest and don't pad your resume, but also don't overlook your awards. We always suggest that students highlight all of their honors and awards in a way that will get the scholarship committee to pay attention to your application.

Tailor Your Application To Fit

Scholarship applications offer limited space in which to cram a lot of information. You will need to do a lot of editing, and may even have to omit many of your accomplishments. As you fill out the application you may find that you are trying to squeeze in too many details, or that you have a bit of room and can expand on your most impressive achievements. Don't forget to adjust font sizes and line spacing if necessary, and keep it readable. In general, don't go smaller than a 10 point font.

Filling The Application

In general, try not to leave any area of the scholarship application blank. You don't need to fill the entire space, but try to list something in every section. Just remember not to stretch the truth, don't lie, and make sure that any "awards" are somewhat relevant. If you've never held any kind of job, then you don't need to list anything under work experience. Remember, however, that if you painted your grandmother's house one summer and got paid for it, that type of experience could be listed.

Before you add any detail, take a moment to think like a scholarship reviewer. Is the information relevant? Does it seem like a stretch? If you cannot convince yourself that what you are listing is justified, then it will certainly not go over well with the actual judges.

Crafting a winning application takes time. Make sure you give yourself plenty of it. However, you also need to balance quality with quantity. Because each scholarship is judged on different criteria, it is not always easy to know whether or not you will be selected for the scholarship. With time as the limiting factor, apply to as many scholarships as you can find that match up with your talents, goals, and achievements. Even the smallest scholarships look very impressive on a resume and curriculum vitae!

PACKAGING SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS:

Tip #1. – Pay Attention to Deadlines

Plan ahead, so that your applications arrive as early as possible, and do not apply after the deadline date! It may be worthwhile to send applications with "Return Receipt Requested" or "Registered Mail" to make sure they arrive in a timely fashion. This also conveys the feeling that the sender takes this application very seriously.

Tip #2 – Include a Cover Letter with Your Application

Here is a sample cover letter for an application, which may be modified for your individual needs.

*1111 WinOne Street
Pensacola, FL 32503*

*Mary Smith, President
Super Duper Scholarship Committee
12345 Pensacola Central Parkway
Pensacola, FL 32500*

9 September, 20XX

Dear Ms. Smith,

Enclosed please find my application for participation in the Super Duper Scholarship Program. I have been accepted to (Name of your College) for the 20XX fall term, and wish to be considered for the Super Duper Scholarship to pursue my studies in Journalism.

I would like to thank you and the Super Duper Scholarship Committee for supporting college bound students with this opportunity for financial assistance through your program. I have included my application form, high school transcript, ACT results, letters of recommendation, and other pertinent information. Again, thank you for your interest in furthering educational opportunities for the youth of our state.

Respectfully,

(Your Name)

Tip #3 – Organize Your Mailing

Place everything in the application envelope so that is EASY for the committee to see that you have provided everything that was required. It is a good idea to provide items in the order that they are listed on the application, and to label them accordingly. If you can avoid it, do not mix items on the same page. If you are specifically told not to include any extra information, then follow instructions! Failing to follow the instructions can be immediately disqualifying.

Tip #4 – Add Some Extra Items (UNLESS YOU ARE TOLD NOT TO!)

Wait a minute... didn't we just tell you not to put in extra information? Well, if you are not told otherwise, then it could be fair game! It can offer a chance to be creative and present yourself in a positive light to the selection committee. Here are a few ideas:

1. A short (no more than one page) essay about your career goals.
2. Any special award or recognition that congratulates you on an accomplishment, from your school or another organization, could make an excellent acknowledgement of your abilities.
3. Any document that shows good citizenship, whether a military draft registration letter, a community service project letter of appreciation, or other similar notification. Many scholarship committee members have civic service or military backgrounds, and appreciate this in an applicant.
4. A letter of admission from one of your more impressive colleges – regardless of whether you will attend the school or not! Assuming, of course, that the scholarship application is not intended only for a specific college, you will be able to use the award at any college. If you later decide to attend another institution, you can simply notify the scholarship award committee of where to send the award. Remember that a letter of acceptance shows that you are serious, and that your college attendance is a reality.

These are just a few examples, and your “extras” may vary considerably. However, try to limit the additional paperwork to three or four pages at the most, lest you dilute your application. Again, MAKE ABSOLUTELY SURE that you are not forbidden to add extra items before you do so.

Tip #5 – Personalize Letters of Recommendation

This tip demonstrates you took the time to make each scholarship application special. When you have a letter of recommendation addressed to the specific organization, or to the person administering the application process, it is infinitely better than a letter that starts with the words "To Whom It May Concern."

SUB TIP #5a – ALWAYS offer to do any additional work for the writers of your letters of recommendation. Asking for ONE letter of recommendation is no big deal for most people, but if you need twenty letters it can become more of a challenge! Once your referee has completed a letter for you, ask if you may put it on the computer so that the recipient can be personalized for each application. In this way, your writer only has to sign his or her name twenty times. If they have official letterhead, you might ask if it is possible for you to use blank copies in this process. If not, then a secretary or assistant may be able to help out.

SUB TIP #5b – If your application does not require a letter of recommendation, then consider including one as an "Extra Item" from Tip #4!

SUB TIP #5c - Try to get three to five good letters of recommendation in your files. This will let you pick and choose which letter/s to send in for a specific application. Never send more than three letters for an application, unless the directions ask for more.

TIP #6 – Proofread All Materials and Keep Things Neat!

Use correct grammar and spelling on your application in every instance. If you tend to have a problem in this area, ask an adult (parent, English teacher, counselor) to assist with proofreading essays, cover letters, extra items, and even letters of recommendation prepared by others. With hundreds (or even thousands) of applications to review, correctness and neatness can become one of the first screening factors. Often, it is only when the number of applications is whittled down to a smaller pile that the content of your application becomes a major factor in the selection process!

TIP # 7 – Consider Submitting Application Materials in a Folder

Completed applications can be placed neatly in a clear plastic folder, with a slide locking binder. You might also consider including a wallet-sized picture in the lower left side of your packet. Place the cover letter on the top, with all of the required items (in order) beneath it. Add any extra items (if not forbidden) at the bottom of the folder.

If "extras" are expressly forbidden, you should consider NOT using a plastic folder. However, this is a judgment call on your part. Read the application carefully again regarding extras. Some judges feel the plastic folders are actually more work (removing the applications from the plastic folders, etc.). Other judges may have no problem with it. Whatever you decide to do, make the application neat and orderly!

Your application packet is a presentation of yourself and your aspirations – you don't want to crinkle it all up by folding it into a small envelope. Use a 9"-by-12" envelope, so your application arrives looking great. Again, consider sending it with "Registered Mail" or "Return Receipt Requested" so you know it arrived!

SCHOLARSHIP Q & A

Q: How can I find out about what scholarships are available?

A: Your best scholarship research sources include: The internet (try some of the many free scholarship search engines, such as the one that can be found at www.fastweb.com); your local community (contact your local chamber of commerce); and your high school guidance counselor and/or college financial aid officer.

Q: Can I apply for a scholarship if I don't know what college I'm going to attend?

A: Absolutely. You actually can start applying for scholarships as early as your freshman year in high school. If you win a scholarship before you know which college you'll attend, the scholarship organization usually will either write you a check (with your assurance that you will use the money for college), or simply give you the money when you decide where to attend college.

Q: Should I have to pay a fee to apply for a scholarship?

A: In most cases, no. Since scholarships are meant to support students who need funds to pay for college, they shouldn't require those same students to shell out money. Usually, scholarships that require a fee are scams. Be aware, and avoid these types of programs!

Q: If I didn't win a scholarship, can I apply again next year?

A: Usually. Unless you no longer qualify for some reason, you can apply for a scholarship again. However, consider whether or not your application will be dramatically stronger the next time around. If you will essentially submit the same application, you probably will be better off spending your time applying to a different scholarship competition.

Q: Can I lose my scholarship once it's been awarded?

A: Yes. Most scholarships that are renewable, meaning that you may receive them for more than one year, will have requirements for you to keep the award. These may stipulate that you must continue to attend the same college, maintain a certain GPA, or keep the same major. If you fail to live up to the requirements, they may revoke the scholarship.

Q: Can I apply for scholarships while I'm a college student?

A: Certainly. In fact, one of the biggest mistakes that many students make is NOT applying for scholarships once they graduate from high school! There are literally thousands of scholarships available for students who are already in college... and even some for graduate students. Look for scholarship opportunities through your college or university.

Q: If I win a scholarship, will my college take away some of my other financial aid?

A: Possibly. Many colleges require you to report the scholarships that you win and then adjust your financial aid package. For example, if you win a \$1,000 scholarship, the college may decrease your financial aid package by \$1,000. However, if your college has this kind of policy, remember to ask them to decrease your loan amount, instead of your grants. It's better to receive more in scholarships, so that you don't have to pay back loan money later! It is still worthwhile, because scholarships look great on your resume.

Q: Can I transfer my scholarship if I go to another school?

A: Maybe. Of course, if the scholarship is from a college or an alumni organization, you can only use it at that specific college. However, if the scholarship is from another group, you can probably transfer the scholarship with you, as long as you still meet the eligibility requirements. However, don't make any assumptions. It's important that you contact the awarding organization directly to ask and make any necessary arrangements.

Q: Should I bother applying for scholarships even if I don't have perfect grades?

A: Definitely, just do your research first. There are scholarships for all kinds of things, including achievements, leadership, public service, art, athletics, theatre and dance. Even the scholarships that are based on academic achievements are often not solely based on grade point averages. Instead, the scholarship boards may be seeking students who best fit their selection criteria, which may include other factors like character, motivation, leadership, ethnicity, religious affiliation, or involvement in specific activities. Find the scholarship/s that fit you best, and apply!

Q: Do all scholarships require an essay?

A: No, but most do. Essays are really the best (and often the only) way for scholarship judges to hear directly from you as an application, and to get to know you beyond your grades, test scores and other data that you provide on your application form. There are some types of scholarships that don't require essays, however, especially those for art or music that may require a portfolio, project or audition.

Q: Can I win a scholarship if my parents make too much money?

A: Yes. There are two types of scholarships: need-based and merit-based. As the name suggests, need-based scholarships are based on your financial need and your parents' income. Merit-based scholarships are based on other factors such as academic or extracurricular achievements, and will not usually be affected by family income.

Q: What is a renewable scholarship?

A: Renewable scholarships can be won once and then renewed in the following years. These are the best kind of scholarship, because you can win the money for more than one year! Just make sure that you live up to your end of the scholarship bargain, and you will receive money each year.