

How to Write a Winning Scholarship Essay

1. Grab the Reader.

Don't waste words restating the question. Look at these two examples of introductory lines. Can you spot the difference?

- **Example #1:** Strong leadership skills are important for many reasons.
- **Example #2:** November 12, 2004, was the day I lost everything.

Example #1 is vague and impersonal. But example #2 is personal, specific and intriguing. It leaves the reader interested and wanting more.

Hit the ground running in your first paragraph. This will help your scholarship essay stand out from the pack.

2. Care About Your Topic

Readers can sense when you have a genuine emotional investment in your scholarship essay. Remember: Don't write about what you think you should write about. Write about what interests you.

3. Make it Memorable

Focus on what makes you stand out. Talk about your personal experience, paint a picture with your words, make them remember your story after reading through hundreds of applications.

4. Be Confident and Brag About Yourself

If you don't believe that you deserve to win this scholarship, neither will the committee. You are writing to one or more individuals who can't wait to hear about the great things you've accomplished. This is not the time to be shy!

5. Follow the Essay Instructions.

Nothing turns a scholarship essay reader off faster than an essay that *almost* applies to the contest guidelines. Don't write under the limit. Don't write over the limit. Big money is at stake, so make sure you give them what they want!

5. Stay Focused on the Scholarship Essay Topic.

Judges are looking at hundreds, sometimes thousands, of scholarship essays so they don't have time to read tangents. Answer the questions that are asked and stay on topic! After writing, reread the question to make sure you covered everything that was asked.

6. Have a Point

Make sure your essay for the scholarship has one unified statement, or idea, behind it. You can look at your statement as your one-sentence answer to the essay question.

Let's say the essay question is, "Describe a time you challenged yourself." Your thesis might be:

"When I first began _____ I had no idea who challenging it would be or how it would change my life".

The rest of your essay will expand on this statement.

7. Avoid Redundant Conclusions.

Keep your essay conclusions interesting instead of simply rephrasing—or worse, restating—your original thesis. Your conclusion should explain why the rest of your essay was important — it should answer the question, “So what?” What was the positive impact of what you did? What did you learn? How will it guide you in the future?

8. Edit, Edit, and Edit Again

You only get one chance to make a first impression. You want the scholarship committee to focus on the content of your essay, not the spelling or grammatical errors.

9. Have Someone Else Proofread Your Essay

You’ve likely been looking at your essay for hours and your brain will simply fill in the blanks when it sees things that are missing or incorrect. Have another person you trust look over your essay once you’ve finished. Check pronoun agreement, tense, commas and anything else that could confuse the reader.

10. Re-adjust and Re-use Your Scholarship Essays.

Don’t waste hours writing a different essay for all the scholarship competitions you enter. There are many scholarships out there, and essay topics tend to overlap. With a bit of tweaking, one scholarship essay can fit the needs of several different contests. Recycle as much as you can but always customize the essay to answer exactly the question you are asked.

11. Save Your Scholarship Essays.

Some organizations may want to interview you months later. There is nothing worse than being unsure what you said in your application!