

Tips for Writing Strong Scholarship and College Application Essays

Things to Consider:

Follow instructions!

Before you begin writing, make sure to read and reread the essay prompt. If the scholarship application is seeking information or asking you particular questions, make sure to answer them fully. Many times you are rated on your ability to directly answer their questions. If you don't answer the question, you could be disqualified.

Gather your thoughts!

Start brainstorming by writing down your unique strengths, qualities, and experiences. Take a career aptitude quiz if you are unsure about what you will want to study. Also consider: work and volunteer experiences, extracurricular activities, and your personal dreams and aspirations for inspiration. Make an outline to organize your thoughts.

Begin writing early!

Before applications are due, write several essays based on common essay prompts. See the back of this sheet for ideas! Always save various essays and drafts so you can refer back to them. Not only will you not need to start from scratch each time, but you will be able to practice honing your writing skills and start really thinking about how you want to represent yourself.

Do your research!

Make sure to research the college or scholarship organization you are applying to and cater your essay accordingly. What is the mission statement of the school or organization? How will you benefit this school by attending? How do your experiences make you qualified for this particular scholarship?

Strive for depth rather than breadth.

Narrow your focus to one or two major themes rather than trying to cover too much. It is tempting to want to talk about as much as possible, but stay aware of your essay prompt, word limit, and attention span of the reader. Make sure you elaborate on the important parts of your essay.

Don't just state; demonstrate!

For example, rather than telling the reader that you value volunteering in the community, illustrate that concept through a story in which you were a volunteer. Walk the reader through your experience by utilizing a strong vocabulary, but also make sure that it sounds like you!

Be original and bring it to life!

Get creative. Bring the reader in with a captivating start and end with a powerful conclusion. Write in a way that provides scholarship committees and admissions officers with insight into your character and goals. Find a way to differentiate yourself from other candidates. What makes you, *you*? Try to dig deep!

Be positive!

The essay writing process is your opportunity for the reader to get to know you. Always try to be optimistic or somehow address positive aspects of your essay topic. How did a difficult circumstance in your life cause you to grow as a person? Consider an addendum to explain deficiencies or blemishes in your academic career.

Steer clear!

When writing about world events or social issues, it may be best to avoid controversial topics, as you don't want to risk offending the reader. This is the rule to play by *unless* this topic specifically relates to what an essay prompt is asking, and you think the scholarship organization/college does want your opinion. It can sometimes pay to take a risk, but be careful!

Edit and Revise!

Make sure that you give yourself enough time to edit and revise your work! Ask a parent, sibling, teacher, mentor and/or guidance counselor to read over your work! It is often helpful to have a few extra sets of eyes to catch spelling and grammatical errors or help you state your ideas more clearly.

Essay Dos and Don'ts:

Dos: Make sure to do these!

- Answer the question/ address the topic
- Proofread for errors
- List strong goals that are also within reach
- Use examples/stories
- Explain abbreviations
- Write enticing introduction and strong conclusion
- Make sure to portray your personality- Be yourself, not the "ideal" candidate
- Be professional
- Be positive! Avoid negativity

Don'ts: Don't make these mistakes!

- Essay too short or too long
- List your accomplishments
- Use clichés (Be original)
- Include basic spelling or grammatical errors
- No structure/flow
- Include irrelevant information- stay on topic!
- Essay not typed
- Use a crazy font or format- Stick with basic fonts like Times New Roman or Arial

Common Essay Prompts and Questions

Even though there are many, many different college and scholarship application essay questions, most of them want you to answer similar things. What makes you unique? Why do you deserve this scholarship? Why should you be accepted into this college? What do you want to accomplish with your education, and how will this scholarship or this college help you achieve your goals? How have your experiences impacted you over time? While applying for scholarships and to colleges, you may come across questions which are variations upon the questions below. These will be good to keep in mind before you start writing either scholarship or college admission essays.

Common Application 2016-2017 Essay Prompts

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
2. The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
3. Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?
4. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.
5. Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

Common Scholarship Essay Questions

1. How will your study of _____ contribute to your immediate or long range career plans?
2. Describe how you have demonstrated leadership ability both in and out of school.
3. Describe your most meaningful achievements and how they relate to your field of study and your future goals.
4. Why are you a good candidate to receive this award?
5. Pick an experience from your own life and explain how it has influenced your development.
6. From a financial standpoint, what impact would this scholarship have on your education?
7. State any special personal or family circumstances affecting your need for financial assistance.
8. How have you been financing your college education?

Scholarship questions via: <http://www.fastweb.com/college-scholarships/articles/brainstorm-common-scholarship-essay-questions>

Scholarship and College Application Essay Helpful Websites

1. princetonreview.com/college-advice/application-essay-topics Includes explanations of how to write Common Application Essays.
2. collegeessayadvisors.com/ This website has a lot of helpful essay tips and articles about what college admissions advisors look for when reading application essays.
3. bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays More great information on how to craft your best college application essays.
4. studentscholarshipsearch.com/tips/scholarship-essay-tips.php This website includes helpful information on writing scholarship essays, with emphasis on 'Choosing Words Wisely,' 'Knowing One's audience,' and more.
5. fastweb.com/college-scholarships/articles/ Information on writing great scholarship essays.

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