




Writing a Scholarship Essay



Making the essay work for you!

A vertical stack of four images on the left side of the slide. From top to bottom: a blue clock face on a blue background, a red clock face on a red background, a green open book on a green background, and a blue open book on a blue background.

Reasons why students don't write scholarship essays (and lose out on scholarships!)

- They hate to write.
- They don't think they will win anyway.
- They don't think they have anything to say.
- They don't think they can write very well.
- They can't get started (writer's block.)

Reasons to Write the Scholarship Essay

- Some scholarships go unclaimed because of lack of applicants.
- Someone is going to win...why not you?
- Everyone has a story to tell!
- There are resources to help you with every stage of the writing process (many right here at OTC.)
- Once you get started, the essay won't be as hard to write as you think. (Starting is the hardest part!)
- Isn't scholarship \$ worth a little effort?



Why is the Scholarship Essay Important?

- Scholarship decisions are made very quickly; you need to immediately make yourself stand out.
- The judges can read all the “facts” about you on the application; the essay is where they can discover your heart and soul.
- The essay is an introduction to who you are, what you value, how you see the world, what you hope to accomplish, and why you need the scholarship.



How Do I Get Started?

- Make sure you read the essay question carefully and answer it completely.
- Give the judges reasons that you are a good fit for the scholarship. What makes you stand out from the other applicants? How can your essay reflect these things without you having to actually state them or brag?



Questions to Ponder...

- Who are you?
- What has made you who you are?
- What are you doing?
- What have you done?
- What are your goals?
- Why are you dedicated to them?
- What in your life reflects that commitment?
- Why do you need a scholarship?
- How will it make a difference?



What Should I Say?

- Talk about things you would enjoy discussing further if given the chance.
- Choose a few key points to develop...three or four are good.
- Think about this: What would the judges find memorable and/or unique about you.
- Be positive!
- Include concrete examples to illustrate larger themes. Don't just tell the judges that you are a dedicated student; *show* them through an example instead.



Concrete Examples

- (Bad) “I am a very hard-working individual.”
- (Good) “At my current job, there is a lot of ‘down-time.’ Instead of just sitting around, I stay busy by dusting, cleaning, taking out the garbage, and doing other chores. I try to look for things that need to be done instead of waiting to be told what to do.”



Organizing the Essay

- Create an outline before you begin to write.
- A complete outline is the key to writing an organized, clear, effective essay.
- Outlines can be formal or more casual—it doesn't really matter as long as you write one!
- Your outline should include everything you want to say in your essay.





Outline Sample

I. Introductory sentence

- a. State your name
- b. State the name of the scholarship for which you are applying.

II. Educational Objectives and Career Goals

- a. Identify your major.
- b. Explain why you selected it.
- c. How will this degree impact your career plans?
- d. What are your future plans?



Outline Sample cont'd

III. Brief Background

- a. Tell about yourself.
- b. How did you get to where you are today?
- c. What is important to you?
- d. Give concrete examples that reflect your character and your strengths.
- e. Include extracurricular interests: volunteer work, hobbies, things that make you stand out or are unusual.

IV. Need

- a. Why do you need a scholarship?
- b. How will it make a difference to you?



Outline Sample cont'd

V. Conclusion

- a. Wrap it up with a couple of sentences.
- b. The ending should make your essay feel finished.
- c. You can include how your education so far has made a difference to you.
- d. You can thank the judges.
- e. Avoid an ending that is too lofty or idealistic (“With my education, I plan to change the world into a beautiful, peaceful place.”)

Stylistic Concerns

- Adhere to all page, length, and font requirements. Don't be disqualified for this reason!
- Make sure you edit and proofread carefully.
- Utilize spell check and grammar check because they are great resources, but recognize their limitations.
- Ask someone else to read your essay and give you honest feedback.
- Give yourself some time away from the finished essay before you begin editing (a minimum of 24 hours is ideal.)
- As you edit, read slowly. Reading aloud is one way to do this. You utilize several senses instead of just sight.





Works Cited

“Writing Scholarship Essays.”

Kansas State University. 24 Apr. 2002. 8 Feb. 2005

<<http://www.ksu.edu/artsci/scholarship/essay.htm>>.

“Writing Scholarship Essays.”

Pierce College. 8 Feb. 2005

<<http://www.pierce.ctc.edu/financialaid/scholarship/essays.php>>.