

Successful Scholarship Applications

FROM A READER'S EYE

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Scholarships and Grants

Scholarships

- Most are merit based such as proven academic or athletic ability, or for a unique characteristic.
- Private scholarships usually have their own application forms and application processes.

Grants

- Most are needs based and awarded based on your family's financial situation.
- Likely require a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE®.

Both are awarded by Government (federal and state), Colleges, and Private Organizations such as foundations, companies, community organizations.

General Considerations

- You may be required to write an essay, pass a written exam, or complete a project demonstrating your potential.
- Programs may specify how scholarship funds must be used, set time restrictions for disbursing the funds, or set a ceiling on qualifying family income.
- Scholarship funds may be paid directly to the college.
- Failure to meet and maintain certain requirements could jeopardize your ability to keep the scholarship.
- Be mindful of deadlines- make a list and stay organized.

Timeline

- According to the National Scholarship Database, nearly 60 percent of scholarship deadlines fall between the months of February and April.
- Begin research in Junior year or summer after and continue with collection of material between September and December.
- Begin applying as soon as ready.
- Continue to look for new offers.
- The first few are the hardest- students will get a flow going.

Scholarship Application Components

- Application Form
- Resumé
- Official Transcript
- Standardized Test Score(s)
- Essay
- Letter(s) of Reference
- Proof of Eligibility (membership)
- Parents Financial Information (tax forms)
- Interview/Audition

Application Form

- Read all criteria carefully before you begin
 - Make sure you qualify
 - Gather all the components
 - Follow all directions
- Fill out form entirely and double check when done, all questions answered and no typos
- If you have questions, contact the group offering the scholarship
- Make copies of everything
- Honor the deadline.

Resumé

- No more than 2 pages, 1 is best
- Keep it clean and simple for ease of reading
- Don't duplicate transcript- add skills gained, achievements, character (active verbs)
- Include informal work experience and activities
- Focus on leadership roles
- Customize for the scholarship you're seeking
- Be honest- don't exaggerate your marks, skills, memberships
- Ask someone to proof read for typos, clarity

Official Documents

- **Transcripts**
 - Plan in advance- many school offices require a few days to produce
 - Ask for several copies to have on hand, most scholarships require them
 - They will come in sealed, secure envelopes
- **Standardized Test Scores**
 - A few can be sent for free when you register for the test but these are usually sent to colleges
 - Additional scores usually cost
 - Most private scholarships do not ask for these

Essay

- This is where you have an opportunity to shine!
- Don't duplicate the resumé- help the reader know you by sharing information/thoughts
- READ the prompt and RESPOND directly to it
- If reusing an essay, be sure it addresses the prompt
- Research the group offering the scholarship- be sure to include information they will find important and valuable and be sure to reference them if possible
- Be enthusiastic- make it personal and passionate

More on the Essay

- Be creative in your choice of words but follow the traditional format of introduction, body and conclusion. Make it easy to read.
- Ask for help, get someone skilled in editing to read before submitting.
- Typos, poorly composed or disorganized sentences, text speak, acronyms are essay killers.
- When done, let it sit a few days then reread. Ask yourself what picture has been painted of you by your essay.

Letters of Reference

- Pick someone who knows you personally and can add a perspective not covered elsewhere in the application (teacher, boss, religious leader, scout master, coach, etc)
- Match the person to the scholarship
- Help them by providing background information on the scholarship group, your skills and experiences
- The more information you give them, the better the letter.

Letters of Reference

- Ask them to provide a personal experience or impression beyond the resumé – you can discuss this together
- Some references may want help writing the letter
- Give them plenty of time to respond and if using the same person for multiple applications, give them the timeline in advance
- The letter should be on their letterhead, if applicable
- Provide addressed, stamped envelopes

Additional Materials

- Check the application to see that all additional materials are included such as proof of eligibility, financial forms.
- Include a cover letter if submitting by mail unless it explicitly says not to include one
- If reusing a cover letter, be sure of the correct name and address
- Sign and date the application
- Track the package if mailed and if emailed select the “Request a delivery receipt” option.

Scholarship Etiquette

- Remember you are asking for free money – everyone involved is going out of their way to assist you
- Always be polite and appreciative throughout the process
- Send a thank you note to the scholarship provider with your proof of enrollment **and** the writer of your recommendation letter for all awards received
- A second letter a year later is always appreciated, giving the provider an update on your education and thanking them for the support

Scholarship Myths

1. Scholarships are only for top scholars and athletes
2. Most scholarship awards are small and not worth the effort of applying.
3. Scholarships are all heavily weighted towards minorities and those with documented financial need
4. Scholarship competition is too intense. It's not worth bothering.
5. You have to be a great essay writer to get one

How America Pays for College 2017

National study by Sallie Mae® and Ipsos

- Nearly all families--98%--were taking steps to make college more affordable.
- Scholarships and grants were the number one college funding source-71% of families reporting
- 35% of college costs were covered by scholarships and grants in academic year 2016-17
- 30% of costs were student funded (borrow, save, work)
- 31% of costs were parent funded (borrow or saved)
- For the complete report: SallieMae.com/HowAmericaPaysForCollege

Reliable Resources and Scams

- Scholarships.com
- Collegeboard.org
- ScholarshipAmerica.org
- Studentaid.ed.gov
- consumer.ftc.gov/scholarshipscams
- Beware of scams! These are red flags:

“The Scholarship is guaranteed or your money back”

“You can't get this info anywhere else/free seminar”

“Credit card/bank account number/cash required”

“We'll do all the work” or “Award with no application”

“High pressure/time sensitive”

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Securing a Successful Scholarship Reference Letter

For the Student

- Identify the right person for the job: research what the scholarship is looking for in terms of awardees and choose the person who knows you in that area best; if academics appear to be the main focus, you want to ask a teacher in who's class you have excelled or improved over time; if character is most important, ask your scout master or someone who can testify to your character strengths. One size does not fit all.
- Look for writers who can tell of a personal experience or give specific examples of your skills/strengths. The goal is to help the reader know you better beyond your transcript and resumé.
- Help the reference writer by giving them as much information as possible. They need to know the information on your resumé, your transcript, your family, your hobbies, and information about the scholarship provider. If possible, discuss situations/examples that you can think of and give the writer some notes to work from. Most writers will be happy for the guidance yet are still free to write what they wish.
- Share this guide with your writers, especially if they are not used to writing letters of reference.
- Give them plenty of time to respond to your request and understand that they may have many similar requests on top of their regular duties. If you have multiple requests, give a spreadsheet of applications with information on each one.
- Provide stamped envelopes if the letter is to be mailed.
- Thank your references and let them know the results of your applications, especially when you receive a scholarship offer.

For the Reference Writer

- Use letterhead whenever possible
- Use standard letter format and font (creativity in this area makes the letter harder to read and distracts from the content)
- Review the student's resumé, transcript and any additional information provided. The resumé and transcript will likely be attached to the application and your goal is to help the reader know the student better, beyond these documents.
- A personal story, example of the student's character/skills, or insight from you can be the difference in moving the application forward.
- When writing multiple letters, it's easier to work from a template. Double check that you have the correct student's name and gender throughout the letter. Likewise letters for multiple students to the same scholarship committee should be unique for each student in some way. An obviously generic letter will not help the student's application.
- Include your title, place of work and contact information in the signature lines.
- Proof read your letter carefully. Typos or other errors detract from your letter.
- It's OK to decline to write a letter if you don't know the student very well (you could help them identify a more suitable writer)