

Scholarship Applications Tips Gathered from Scholarship Providers and Recipients

General Scholarship Tips for High School and College Students

- Remember, due to limited funding, not all applicants receive scholarships. The process is competitive, and you should be careful and thorough when filling out your application to give yourself the best possible advantage.
- If you were not selected in the past years, re-evaluate your qualifications and application package. Be certain that you make academic progress in the next term, earn the highest GPA possible, and make any necessary adjustments in your application process, then reapply next year.
- Do not assume that because you have received a scholarship previously, that you will automatically receive another award. Some students make the error of assuming that they will not have to be as careful filling out their application package and writing their personal statement when applying the second or even third time around. Be aware that there are always new students competing for awards. You must present a high quality package every time you apply for a scholarship.
- Talk to scholarship recipients to get their advice on the application process, scholarship search process, etc.

Pre-Application Tips:

- Start to build a network of professionals and educators who are willing to advise you, write recommendations, proofread your applications and essays, and guide you through the application process.
- Be ready with the necessary information and experience to apply for need and/or merit based funding.
- Each scholarship fund has its own specific guidelines. Before applying for a scholarship, be certain that you meet, or will meet, all the necessary qualifications such as academic standing, specified financial situation, and personal or professional background and explain how you meet them.

General Application Tips:

- If you are filling out a paper application, have multiple copies of the application in case you make a mistake and must start over.
- Make a checklist of what you need to have for the application.
- Make a copy of your ENTIRE application and keep it in a folder. That way, if your submission is lost, you can easily and quickly send another copy.
- Unless otherwise stated, please bind all the materials for the application together. It makes it easier to keep up with loose sheets.
- Put your name on all of the materials; photo, every page of the essay, recommendations, etc. If part of your application is misplaced, there will be no confusion as to what belongs to which applicant.

- If you have multiple names, i.e. two last names, please be consistent with which name you go by. Do not put "James Avery" when you go by "James Avery-Johnson." It makes clarification easier.
- If the application asks for a GPA or other specific information, fill in the information, do not write "see transcript."
- If you want to be taken seriously, consider getting a generic email address rather than a cutesy one like "jellybean07" or "pimpstress" or "lopezlover." Email is used as a form of contact with applicants. Consider setting up a separate email account for college information and scholarship information. Make sure that your email address is clearly legible. If filling out by hand, put a slash through zeros so they do not look like letters.
- If a required attachment will be sent from another source, such as a high school or college transcript or financial aid information, it is up to you to make sure the information has been sent.
- No substitutions! If an item is requested, particularly for a need-based program, provide it. If you don't understand the request, ask. In competitive programs, the missing or substituted item could tank an otherwise strong application.
- Read your application packet and ask yourself, "Would I give an award to this person if all I knew about them is the information presented in these documents?"
- Don't let a parent fill out the application.
- Your application package represents the entire and only picture of you the selection committees have. Always type (or neatly print using black ink) your application. Your application must appear neat and professional.
- Proofread your application. Pay particular attention to any spaces you have left blank. If the answer is zero, write in 0 rather than leaving a blank spot. If the question does not apply to you, do not write in N/A. You risk eliminating yourself for the selection process. Simply answer the question to the best of your knowledge. Blank spaces can deem your application incomplete and ineligible!
- Have at least one other person review your application package, and supporting documents, including your personal statement or essay. Find the most qualified person to proofread for you.
- Start early! Rushing to the post office to get a piece of mail postmarked on the day of a deadline is not really that much fun--it's stressful! Leave plenty of time to check, double-check, and triple-check to make sure all directions have been followed and that you are turning in the best application possible. Scrambling leads to mistakes. Use a calendar to keep yourself on top of things. Remember that there is nothing wrong with turning in an application before the deadline!
- If a photo is requested, use a suitable color head shot, not your prom photo or photo sitting on the beach and wearing inappropriate clothing.
- Be sure to follow guidelines. If the application asks for a self-addressed stamped postcard to receive confirmation, include that. Don't include an envelope; follow the guidelines.
- If you are notified that you have received a scholarship always send a thank you note to the donor. If appropriate, continue to keep the donor informed of your progress throughout the year.

Personal Statement/Essay Tips:

- The committee wants to know three things: why are you right for the scholarship, why it is right for you, and why it is important to you.
- Your personal statement/essay is viewed as the equivalent of a face-to-face interview.

- Avoid long, drawn out, essay responses. While a background story is sometimes necessary, try to get to the point but don't be so brief that the importance is lost. Remember the committee members reading your essay have many more applications to read.
- If the essay prompt calls for an explanation and you provide an article, still explain what you have done and do not simply put "See attached article."
- If you have a story that reflects overcoming obstacles, tell it. If not, express your appreciation for the benefits of a solid home life; it's still the best gift parents can give.
- If you make a case based on financial need, you need to do so carefully and convincingly; that is, NOT simply say, "I really need this scholarship."
- For scholarships that have a financial need component, tell your story if there is something that is out of the ordinary. If you don't know if your story is unusual but you wonder, ask the high school counselor or any financial aid person, including the scholarship administrator. If something impacted your EFC (Expected Family Contribution) that was a one time situation, most will consider the difference.
- Make connections between areas of study, career goals, interests, and personal philosophies.
- You should be certain that all requested topics are covered in your personal statement/essay. Use specific examples whenever possible.
- Part of your proofreading should include attention to the tone of what you have written. Do you sound like a student that the donor's organization would be proud to sponsor?
- Remember to BE YOURSELF. Do not try to give a response that you think will be liked by the selection committee. All selection committees are looking to decipher your own, UNIQUE personality, not one crafted to fit what you think the judges are looking for. An honest reply will usually get you far.
- Save your essays on the computer or a disk. It will save frustration when websites have errors or it could save you time when you come across the essay question for a different scholarship. You can pull up the old essay you wrote, edit or expand on ideas, and submit your revised copy. That will save you time that you could use to apply for additional scholarships.
- Really make the most of essay questions. For example, if asked, "Of all the activities you are involved in, which one means the most to you?" Keep in mind that this does not necessarily have to be the activity you spend the most time doing. In one case, when writing this kind of essay, a student was torn between describing involvement in the school's theater troupe or a role on the school's honor council. Though more hours were spent rehearsing for and performing in plays, the student felt like the work as an honor prefect had done more to impact the life of the school community and also to change the way that integrity was defined and priorities were viewed. Therefore, the student was able to show more about personality and values by writing about honor council.
- If you start to feel like you're bragging about yourself too much, don't worry about it. In a sense, that's what you are trying to do. You're hoping to impress the scholarship committee with your accomplishments.
- Don't just describe what you have accomplished, but also share how you felt when making those achievements.

Recommendation Letter Tips:

- Ask the recommender to fill out the form if one is provided. Some scholarships have the need to find evidence of some really specific personality trait that was set by the donor whose generosity

made the scholarship available. Eloquent letters of reference that do not touch on that one specific trait make it hard for the evaluator to find evidence of the required trait.

- Good examples of people to ask for references include past or present teachers/professors, past or present employers, religious leaders, community leaders, and organization leaders. Generally, family and friends do not make the best references. The person you ask should know you personally and be able to attest to specific qualifications outlined in the scholarship requirements, i.e., financial need, GPA, community service, leadership roles, etc. They should be able to write about your character, commitment, experiences and successes.
- The letter should be tailored to the particular scholarship, not generic.
- Provide the recommender with a resume or list of your activities and accomplishments.
- Always give the recommender adequate time to prepare your letter or form.

Cover Letter/Resume/CV Tips:

- Do not include a cover letter, resume, or CV if the application does not request it.
- Show you have worked--either with substantial responsibilities in the home or in summer/school year jobs. This may not be an important qualification for a lot of scholarships, but work/employment responsibilities build character as much as many other activities.
- Provide evidence that you have made something good happen. That's leadership. If you have made a difference--in whatever way--share it.
- Show evidence that you believe in something apart from the certainty you hope to make a million dollars. What are you doing, or what do you hope to do, that will make the world a slightly better place?
- Never think that any accomplishment or activity is too insignificant to be mentioned. If you're proud of it, passionate about it, or think there is something even slightly interesting or unique about it, include it! Now is not the time to sell yourself short!
- Spell out abbreviations that may not be generally recognized.
- Include part time work, list of awards, achievements, etc.

Transcript/Academic Record Tips:

- If you have an off-semester or even a course grade that is an aberration, explain the situation/circumstance/reason. Leaving it out there for the evaluator to guess is not in your best interest.
- Make sure your transcript is properly sealed, with school stamp/signature across the seal.
- If your school's grading system is not based on a standard scale, include a description of how your school determines grades.

Scholarship Search Tips:

- There are many scholarship opportunities available, so never limit yourself to applying for just one. Research as many funding sources as you can, and learn which ones you may qualify for, then apply promptly.
- Find at least two search engines with which you're comfortable--use both to search for scholarship opportunities. Two good examples include www.fastweb.com and www.scholarships.com. For international students, be sure to search

www.internationalscholarships.com. Remember to check the schools that you are applying to. Many schools offer scholarships to students that seek them.

- Use your parents/family members! Many companies offer scholarships solely to the children/relatives of employees.
- If receiving lots of e-mail from a search engine bothers you, set up a scholarship-only email account. This will keep all of your scholarship information in one place, your regular inbox won't be overflowing, and when you use your scholarship e-mail, you are more focused on searching for scholarship information.
- Organize the information in a way that makes sense to you. For example, when using Fastweb, click on the "deadline" heading to sort the scholarships according to deadline.
- Look where you're going! If you are headed for a specific field, look at the leaders in that field or industry, check their websites for scholarship opportunities. For example, a pre-nursing or pre-med student should check out websites for drug manufacturers or companies that do medical research. Most companies' websites are searchable. Try searching "scholarships." If that doesn't yield results, try "foundation" or "philanthropy."
- You can also check the websites of major companies for scholarship opportunities.
- Look at local organizations/groups such as churches and recreational centers.