

Things you should know about applying for scholarships...

What to apply for:

- Apply for everything you're qualified for, but don't read too much into the criteria. For example, if it says a scholarship is for biology majors, but you're a journalism major, skip that one. If it says it is being given by the St. Louis chapter of an organization, don't assume that you must have some tie to St. Louis to be considered. Sometimes though, if you think the criteria restricts the applicant pool astronomically, apply anyways. For example, Women in Aviation scholarships have been awarded to male students simply because a male was the only applicant. Use your judgment though, and don't skip one you are qualified for to apply for the long shot instead.
- There are lots of places to look. Your university's financial aid office is a great place to start. Don't forget professional and community organizations related to your intended career field. Many employers have scholarships reserved for the children of employees too.

The application package

- Don't handwrite anything except your signature. It doesn't matter how legible your handwriting is. It just makes your whole application seem more professional. Go find a typewriter if you have to. If you can't edit the application form, take a screenshot of it, drop it into publisher as a background, and use text boxes to fill in the blanks. Just don't handwrite anything except your signature.
- Don't abbreviate. Actually write out "South Carolina" instead of "SC." This also applies to the essay.
- Don't leave anything blank.
- Use good paper. Go get the 32 lb resume paper and print everything on that. White or cream is good. Stay away from pink or other colors.
- Keep it tidy. Nothing looks sloppier than an application form with a big ring from a coffee cup on it or grease stains that make it look like you used it as a napkin (this has actually happened).
- Don't leave anything out. Don't add extra items either. If it says an official transcript, make sure you put it in there (don't send an unofficial transcript either). If it says to submit triplicates, make sure you include them. If an essay is required, write one. If you omit or add items, it says "I don't pay attention or follow instructions," which makes you not look like the kind of person they want their money going to. If there are optional items, include them. It says "I go above and beyond."
- Keep your font simple and your margins and spacing normal. A font like calibri or times new roman, in a size equivalent of times new roman 12 point font is good. Single spacing is fine, but I recommend 1.15 spacing. It's just a little easier on the eyes, and you do want the committee to enjoy reading your essay! Double space if they tell you to, otherwise, I'd stick with 1.15 spacing. Margins should be approximately 1 inch all around. Don't try to make it look longer by fooling around with margins, font size, or spacing. It sticks out like a sore thumb and makes it look like a children's book.

Essays

- If there is a word limit, make sure you abide by it! Judges know what a 500 word essay looks like. If yours is 550, they'll be able to tell without even counting words. Spell check will count your words for you if you select that setting in the options. Check the box for "show readability statistics." If you end up just a little long, you can always reword sentences to cut down the word count without sacrificing content.
- Get "really" and "very" out of your vocabulary. Do a Ctrl+F to find them if you have to. These are two very useless words that get really overused. Wouldn't that sound better if I said, "These are two utterly useless words that get frequently overused?" You're a smart person with a good vocabulary. Sound like it.
- No passive voice. The percentage of passive voice sentences is included in the readability statistics. Passive voice makes you sound wimpy. For those of us who are fuzzy on what passive voice is, active voice is somebody doing something. Passive voice is something happening to someone. For example:
 - Passive: The scholarship was awarded to Faith.
 - Active: Alex won the scholarship.
- No abbreviations or contractions. I realize this sounds idiotic, but if it gets really competitive, and it's narrowed down to you and one other applicant, they may award funds based on who has the most aesthetically pleasing package. Abbreviations and contractions are not visually pleasing, apparently. This has actually happened.
- Proof read, proof read, proof read! Take it to a writing lab if you need a fresh set of eyes (a much better option than your friend who's favorite quote about English class is "C's get degrees"). Another good trick is to read it backwards, sentence by sentence. It takes things sufficiently out of context that your brain will actually process what is on the page... not what it EXPECTS is on the page. It's a great way to catch sentence fragments, sentences that just don't make sense, repeat words, etc.
- Stay on target. Answer everything the prompt asks for, but don't go on rabbit trails. If it asks for your future plans in your career, don't ramble about how you got started. You're wasting that precious word count.
- Don't sound like a fruitcake. This should go without saying. Now is not the time to showcase your ability to interject symbolism (or excessive figures of speech or any other form of general insanity) into anything. For example, a scholarship asked how applicants would attract more pilots to participate in the Air Safety Foundation's free educational programs. An applicant wrote an essay that went something like this:

First I would examine the pilot population to see what sort of "buckets" the pilots fit into. Maybe there is a bucket of airline pilots, and a bucket of corporate pilots, and a bucket of flight instructors, and a bucket of weekend flyers. Then I would categorize the programs offered into their respective buckets. There could be a bucket of courses for instrument flying, a bucket of airspace courses, a bucket of general knowledge, etc. Then I would match the

buckets of pilots to the buckets of programs... (It was all the committee could do to read it without laughing about the “buckets of buckets.”)

The dreaded financial need essay

- This is one of the hardest essays to write, because people suddenly turn into whining pansies when it's time to write this. So first things first: NO WHINING. Don't ramble about how “winning this scholarship would make my college experience less stressful and allow me to focus more on my studies.” 98% of people write that exact sentence, and it just sounds whiney.
- Lay out the numbers. Tell them how much your tuition and lab fees are for the school year. How much you have in financial aid (but I'd consider omitting actual scholarship/financial aid numbers if you're in really good shape). Tell them exactly how much is left to pay for. Tell them what their scholarship would do to move you forward. For example, if their scholarship would pay for a course lab that would then open up an important internship opportunity that you need to graduate, say so!
- If you have some sort of financial hardship, say so... but the no whining rule still applies. Just state it matter-of-fact and move on. The committee can draw some conclusions of their own. If a parent lost their job, your family has big medical bills to pay, etc, include that, because it hampers your ability to pay for your education, but don't whine about how stressful and traumatizing it's been.

Letters of recommendation

- Ask for them early. Two weeks is considered a minimum amount of time to get a letter written. Your letter writers have full time jobs and families, so you're giving them something extra to do.
- Be prepared. There's a few items you need to have ready:
 - A copy of the application. If your writer can see what the application is emphasizing, they can tailor your letter to emphasize those areas too
 - A resume. This is not the normal one-page resume. The longer the better. Provide some details about your activities and jobs so they can write with a greater sense of familiarity. (That said, in order to even have a resume, you need things like a job and community/extracurricular involvement. If you're coming up short there, start working on that.)
 - Bad: Rise Against Hunger – April 2017
 - Good: Rise Against Hunger – Worked as a team, packaging 10,000 meals to be shipped to Haiti, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. The meals are served in local schools since the guarantee of one healthy meal a day makes the difference between a child getting an education vs. staying at home to work alongside their parents. Education then provides the family a better future. – April 2017
 - A deadline. Know when you need the letter so your letter writer can prioritize their tasks accordingly.
- Make friends in high places. Get to know your professors and people in the industry you want. You want letters from people with impressive sounding titles, but who know you well enough to

write about you. It's never too early to start networking. Plus, you never know who will be that contact who someday tips you off about the posting for your dream job. Use a minimum of one personal reference. One personal (i.e. pastor), one educational, and one professional reference is a good mix. It's rare to need more than three letters of recommendation, so you can use those three people in whatever combination you need.

- No letters from family. The only exception to this is if you work at your family's business. If that's the case, make sure the letter doesn't hint that you're related.

Mailing your application

- Go to the post office and get that stiff envelope that will keep everything from being creased. You splurged on the good paper, and kept your food and drink away from your application, so don't mess it up now with a bunch of folds. No staples or paperclips either. Paperclips leave creases and staples get ripped off. Keep your application pretty, even after it arrives to the committee.
- Get it there on time. Some deadlines are "must be received by" while others are "postmarked by." If it arrives late, it won't even be considered. That said, plan ahead, track your deadlines.

If you don't get it the first time

- Keep trying! Sometimes the third time is the charm. Just keep tweaking your application. Getting 1 out of 5 scholarships is a good batting average, so if you don't succeed at first, don't give up!

Why you should believe me...

I've been there, done that on all things scholarships. As a college student, I accumulated approximately \$75,000 - \$80,000 in scholarship funds, utilizing everything I just wrote out for you. I also started teaching scholarship workshops to help my fellow students win some scholarships of their own. After college, I spent five years as a college professor. I've written countless recommendation letters, helped students write non-whiney, active voice essays, and chaired scholarship committees. I have friends on other scholarship committees who have told me about what they look for (and shared stories about comically awful applications), and how picky it can get (yes, using contractions and acronyms lost me a scholarship once). I've seen just about every aspect of the scholarship process, and I hope that what I know can somehow benefit you.

I wish you nothing but the best, and if I can be of assistance, I'll be happy to help!

Karrie Bowden