

Writing a Scholarship Essay

A scholarship essay allows a committee to get to know you. However, where do you start?

Begin with answering the following questions: Who is offering the scholarship? What are the judges hoping to learn from the questions they ask? How well do you match the scholarship foundation's goals and vision?

First Paragraph: Match your vision with the scholarship foundation's vision in an introduction. For example, for a National Merit Scholarship, emphasize the thrill of learning and using this learning to teach others. For a private scholarship named for a specific person who did great things in the community, focus on how hard you have worked at applying academics to various areas of service and how responsible you are. The body of both essays will probably stay mostly the same. With a one-page essay, confine the topics to one paragraph each. With a longer essay, provide more information and details.

Second Paragraph: Develop the ideas presented in the introduction. What makes these accomplishments important to you? What are you passionate about, and what actions have you taken to further your development in these areas? What stands out about you? Do you have a burning desire to learn, a quest to change the world, or a passion for service? Give concrete examples of leadership, academics, and character qualities explaining when and how you accomplished these.

Third Paragraph: Discuss other interests (e.g., athletics, civic projects, charity work) and the future. How do all of your activities come together to further your future goals or career plans?

Finally: Wrap it up and repeat an image or reference mentioned in the first paragraph.

Recommendations:

Do

- Start with a quote that has meaning for you, perhaps, or a family saying that has guided you.
- Mention past achievements or what you learned from your failures.
- Bring up activities you are heavily involved in and to which you are committed.
- Talk about what you have to offer. Are you a good investment?
- Draw parallels between your personal traits and those of the scholarship benefactor.
- Be interesting. The readers look at thousands of these—what makes **you** stand out?
- Use present tense and positive statements to show energy and vibrancy.
- Emphasize balance in academics and family life.
- Be specific about how you will use the money.

Don't

- Start with name, date, birthplace, and/or names of parents.
- Repeat information found elsewhere in the application or transcript.
- Exaggerate.
- Be vague—if you mention leadership, state how, where, and when.
- Say, "I need this scholarship because I need the money." Say, "I will use this scholarship to . . ."