



Searching and Applying for Private Scholarships

Private scholarships don't provide the largest source of money for most students; that "big money" comes from the federal government and colleges through need-based and merit aid. Still, private scholarships are worth pursuing to help with your college costs—every dollar helps! And, a few private scholarships can cover your full costs of college!

Tips to Maximize your Scholarship Search:

1. Let *everyone* know that you're looking for scholarships.

Increase your odds of finding great scholarships by searching your own personal and family network. Look into scholarships that might be offered by your church, your parents' work places, your employer/internship site, your credit union, any organizations where you have volunteered, your current and former schools, local or national student organizations... And make sure to check in often with your school counselor and read any information in senior updates.

2. Get/stay involved with your community.

Students who volunteer enjoy a huge advantage with scholarship sponsors. Scholarship sponsors are looking for a long-time commitment to volunteering. This bias towards volunteering makes sense since many scholarship providers are nonprofits committed to helping others.

3. Look professional.

Google your name to make sure that you have a professional online presence. Remove any inappropriate material from Facebook. And don't use a risky email account. Keep it boring.

4. Use a scholarship search engines and phone apps.

Using scholarship search engines will make your job easier. Please keep in mind that many scholarship sites will share your personal information with other sites. Here are some to check out:

- [Fastweb](#)
- [Scholarships.com](#)
- [College Board- Big Future](#)
- [SallieMae](#)
- [Cappex](#)
- [UNCF](#)
- [Scholly](#) (phone app)
- [Niche](#)
- [JLV Counseling](#)
- [Chegg](#)
- [College Greenlight](#)

5. Search for awards on Twitter.

Use hashtags like #scholarships, #meritscholarships, #financialaid and #privatescholarships. You should find information about private scholarships from scholarship providers, schools, counselors and others. Students and parents will find tweets and links about private scholarships from scholarship providers, counselors, schools and others. When you locate people who are providing valuable information about scholarships, start following them. Also check to see whom these people are following.

6. Don't ignore the optional questions.

When supplying your background on scholarship search engines, answer the optional questions. Addressing these questions can generate about **twice** as many scholarship matches. Students may want to re-search scholarships using different profile information, one profile that remains broad and one that is more specific.

7. Apply to every eligible scholarship.

It's a numbers game and even among the most accomplished students, luck is a factor. Don't ignore the small stuff. Some scholarships worth \$1,000 or less may only have 15 or 20 students applying.

8. Look for essay contests.

Students can be lazy and many will skip scholarship contests that require an essay. Applying for these scholarships could increase your odds of success.

9. Be passionate.

When you're writing a scholarship essay let your personal voice come through. Include lots of details in your essay that helps reveal who you are. It's usually a good idea to focus on a problem and how you solved it or overcame adversity.

10. Think local.

Ask your high school counselors about local scholarships. Also check bulletin boards at libraries and outside financial aid offices. Local scholarships are going to be easier to win than regional and national ones. (*Check your Naviance Student site and look under the Scholarship List in the Colleges section. Also, make sure to apply for scholarships offered through:

- [The Columbus Foundation](#)
- [I Know I Can](#)

Tips for Completing and Submitting your Scholarship Applications:

Tip #1: Apply only if you are eligible.

Read all the scholarship requirements and directions carefully to make sure you're eligible before you send in your application.

Tip #2: Complete the application in full.

If a question doesn't apply, note that on the application. Don't just leave a blank. Supply all additional supporting material, such as transcripts, letters of recommendation and essays.

Tip #3: Follow directions.

Provide everything that's required, but don't supply things that aren't requested—you could be disqualified.

Tip #4: Give the scholarship sponsor what it wants.

A **scholarship application** often contains the sponsor's scholarship selection criteria, but dig deeper. Research the scholarship sponsor on the web. Look for the organization's mission statement, which you'll often find in the "About Us" section of its website.

Tip #5: Write an essay that makes a strong impression.

The key to writing a strong essay is to be personal and specific. Include concrete details to make your experience come alive: the who, what, where, and when of your topic. The simplest experience can be monumental if you present honestly how you were affected.

Tip #6: Watch all deadlines.

To help keep yourself on track, impose your own deadline that is at least two weeks prior to the official deadline. Use the buffer time to make sure everything is ready on time. Don't rely on extensions—very few scholarship providers allow them at all.

Tip #7: Make sure your application gets where it needs to go.

Put your name (and Social Security number, if applicable) on all pages of the application. Pieces of your application may get lost unless they are clearly identified.

Tip #8: Keep a back-up file in case anything goes wrong.

Before sending the application, make a copy of the entire packet. If your application goes astray, you'll be able to reproduce it quickly.

Tip #9: Give it a final "once-over."

Proofread the entire application carefully. Be on the lookout for misspelled words or grammatical errors. Ask a counselor, teacher or parent to proofread it as well. If completed using a paper application, make sure the application is neat,

Tip #10: Ask for help if you need it.

If you have problems with the application, don't hesitate to ask your school counselor or call the funding organization.

Parts adapted from: Lynn O'Shaughnessy, The College Solution

10 Tips For Writing Effective Scholarship Essays:

1. Read the instructions and make sure you understand them before you start writing.
2. Organize your thoughts before you start writing. Begin the writing process by writing an outline.
3. Know your audience. Research the scholarship provider(s).
4. Make sure your outline touches on every aspect required per the instructions
5. Write your essay by elaborating on each of the points in your outline.
6. Use clear, concise and simple language throughout the essay.
7. State your accomplishments without coming across as if you are bragging.
8. Make sure your grammar and spelling are impeccable.
9. Read the question again and then read your essay to be certain that the essay addresses every point.
10. Have someone with strong writing and editing skills proofread the essay before you submit it.

Adapted from *Scholarships.com*

4 Tips to Make Your Scholarship Essay Stand Out

It's not easy to separate your scholarship application from the crowd. After all, even if you fit the criteria to a "T," you're still likely to be one of a number of applicants with similar grades, goals, activities, and aspirations.

That's where a great application essay comes in. The essay is your best chance to make the case for why you should receive the scholarship; it helps the scholarship provider learn about the person behind the application, and gives them a much more detailed look at your school and home life.

If you use them right, those few paragraphs can help your application stand out—and could mean the difference between getting a "thanks for applying" E-mail and an award check.

Of course, putting so much emphasis on an essay may make it seem like a daunting task, especially if you don't consider yourself a great writer. By following these four tips, just about anyone can create a standout essay.

1. Know your audience: Although we're looking at scholarship essays as a whole, it's important to realize that every scholarship provider is looking for a specific student who meets unique criteria. When you get your application, look closely at the questions, the organization giving the scholarship, and any past recipients you can find.

Are they emphasizing classroom performance? Looking for someone who's dealt with adversity at home? Interested in character or community service more than grades? Whatever the answer, your research will put you a step ahead of applicants who are copying and pasting "one-size-fits-all" essays.

2. Plan far in advance: You can also avoid the "one-size-fits-all" essay by getting an early start on each application. Begin your research and planning a week or so before you think you should, and you'll be able to take enough time to turn out something great.

This will also give you time to craft an outline, which can help your essay stay concise and on target. Think of two or three main points you want to make in response to the essay question, add some supporting information under each of them, and consider a sentence or two of introduction and conclusion. Before you know it, you'll have built the structure and thesis of your essay, and you won't have to rush to write it.

3. **Make it personal and passionate:** When you do start writing, don't forget that the main purpose of your essay is to convince the scholarship provider that you're the student they've been looking for. Answer the questions you've set out in your outline, but make sure every point you make is illustrated with a specific detail that shows you care about the subject.

Don't just mention that you work with disadvantaged kids; tell them how your love of soccer got you into coaching those kids. Don't just tell them about your acting awards; show how the stage helped you conquer your shyness. Putting your unique interests and perspectives on the page will go a very long way toward creating a memorable essay.

4. **Find an editor:** Last but not least, make sure you have time to run your essay by a good editor, whether it's a parent, teacher, or grammar-nerd friend. Even a well-researched and passionately written essay can be derailed by spelling mistakes or awkward sentences, and if you've spent a lot of time looking at your words, it's easy to miss basic mistakes.

A few minutes of proofreading by a trusted editor can make a huge difference. I also recommend reading your essay aloud to yourself, so you can hear how it flows.

Scholarship essays are a big component of your applications, and can be a major headache, too. But by starting early, answering the right questions, and describing what makes you unique, you'll be writing standout essays without the stress.

Source: Matt Konrad, *US News and World Report*

6 Scholarship Essay Errors:

1. Rushed writing: You may work great under pressure, but no one is at his or her best when rushed and stressed. Start your application early and give yourself plenty of time to brainstorm ideas. Use school breaks or write your essays the summer before you start applying, so you're not preoccupied with homework, sports, and school activities.

2. Not knowing your audience: Once you have a stack of scholarship apps in front of you, take some time to get to know the organizations that are sponsoring the scholarships. Check out their websites and pay attention to their vision, history, and programs. Then think about ways you can make your essay appeal to their missions, or at least avoid offending them. And make sure you follow the directions. Don't write a 700-word single-spaced essay if it calls for 500 words, double spaced.

3. Choosing a vanilla topic: Most scholarship applications aren't going to accept your YouTube videos in place of a written essay, but you can still stand out. It starts with picking a topic that's unique and

interesting but that still answers the question. "What I learned on my summer vacation" has been done before. (Tip: try doing an online search on "popular scholarship essay topics." Then you'll know which ones to avoid.)

4. Uncreative writing: Use imagery to draw your reader in. Instead of beginning an essay with: "My father inspires me because he puts his life on the line serving as a Chicago police officer," consider an opening like this: "Every day at 5 a.m. sharp, Dad rolls quietly out of bed, polishes his badge until it shines, carefully buckles on his gun belt, and signs on as a police officer for the city of Chicago. My mother starts her day saying a prayer that Dad will come home safely."

5. Using "text speak": While getting to the point is almost always a good thing, that doesn't mean you can shorten words using "text speak." I'm sure most of you know the difference between the proper way to write a text vs. an essay, but believe it or not, text speak has been slipping into college application and scholarship essays. Though you probably won't accidentally write an entire essay in text, if you're constantly working your Blackberry thumbs, you may have to steer away from your instinct to use "thru" instead of "through" or to drop in an "IMO."

6. Unpolished and unproofed: Before you run spell-check or start looking for proper punctuation, make sure your essay shines. Are your phrases eloquent and intelligent, without sounding like you chose all your words from a thesaurus? Does your essay paint a picture for the reader? Will the reader care about—but not pity—you? Read your essay aloud and ensure it makes sense. Most high schools have writing centers where you can get advice for your essay—take advantage of them. To catch spelling errors or misplaced commas, read your essay backward. E-mail your essay to your parents and trusted advisers. A fresh set of eyes can prevent a big mistake.

Source: Michelle Showalter, *US News and World Report*