

## Scholarship Essay Guide

### **Master the Basics**

Pay attention to details for a high quality essay.

**Get organized.** Brainstorm to generate some good ideas and then create an outline to help you get started.

**Demonstrate originality and creativity.** To catch the attention of a panel of scholarship judges, find a hook that will get the reader interested right away.

**Show, don't tell.** For example, if you're describing an activity you participated in, don't describe it in general terms. Be specific! What duties did you perform? What affect did it have on your life or the lives of others?

### **Develop a theme that fits the scholarship.**

What sort of student is the sponsor looking for? Include elements in your essay that complement the sponsor's expectations (without pretending to be someone you aren't).

**Turn in a professional-looking essay.** Write a second draft to catch mistakes and better organize your thoughts. If possible, type and doublespace your essay. Check spelling and grammar. Also, share your essay with friends, family or teachers for another proofread.

### **What Do Judges Look For?**

Make it past the first round by following these simple rules:

- **Do you qualify?** Sounds simple, but students every year waste time by applying for awards they aren't eligible to win. If you don't qualify, don't enter the contest.
- **Is your application presented well?** Type your essay. Messy handwriting and excessive scratch-outs could land your application in the trash.
- **Did you include all required documents?** Required docs frequently left out of an application include: transcripts, photos, references and a letter of recommendation.
- **Did you answer all of the questions?** Double-check that you haven't forgotten any required information.

**FastTip:** Remember that scholarship and financial aid information should be free! Search for FREE scholarships at: [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com).

### **I Don't Know What to Write About!**

Take the intimidation out of writing essays by turning your achievements, goals and interests into essay topics:

#### Personal Achievements

- Remember to personalize your experience. For example, what makes the volunteer and community service you've performed unique?
- Do you still keep in touch with anyone you've helped?
- Talk about specific interactions you may have had with others. How did you influence their lives?
- How did your achievements reflect your values? Why are your achievements important to you?
- Remember that judges want to hear from you as a person, not your resume.

#### Academic Plans and Possible Major

- Instead of saying, "Math is my favorite subject," discuss a specific assignment or project that you worked on that sparked your interest.
- Avoid saying that you selected a major or career path to "help people." What specific actions can you take to improve the lives of others? Discuss specific values or ideas you want to develop once you get to college.

#### Background and Influences

- Is there a person you wish to emulate with your chosen major or career path? Someone who encouraged you to succeed? Focus on specific qualities or actions that the person has inspired in you.
- Think about your friends and family, community, and the things you've learned outside of the classroom. Pick specific people, incidents and learning experiences to write about that will let your personality come through.

#### Current Events and Social Issues

- Think about current issues or events in the news that you feel strongly about.
- Do you know a lot about a controversial topic?
- Do you know of someone who is directly involved in an issue who might be able to provide insight?

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## Final Decision: College Choice

You've already narrowed your college choices. Here are some tips to help you make a final decision.

### Not-So-Obvious College Questions

#### College Cost:

**What is my actual cost?** Other expenses beyond just the "sticker price" for tuition can include:

- Lab fees
- Returned check fees
- Fee to add/drop a course
- Transportation home
- Key replacement
- Computer/Internet fees
- Car expenses (gas, parking, insurance, etc.)
- ID card replacement
- Application and doc fees
- Late tuition penalty
- Security deposit

**What is the average increase in tuition and other costs from year to year?**

View at least three years worth of data to chart past increases.

**What are the opportunities for employment on or near campus?**

Finding a job close to campus could mean doing without the expense of a car.

#### Academics:

**How easy is it to switch majors?** Will it mean spending more time in school? What other majors are available?

**How will Advanced Placement (AP)/previous college credits be counted?** Will credits be equal in value?

**What percentage of students graduate in four years?** Ask for an explanation if the on-time graduation rate is low. Is it difficult to get into required classes?

**What kind of career planning services are available?** Does the college offer any placement services?

#### Living on Campus:

**Is your prospective college safe?** Ask if your school has emergency call boxes, campus escorts and ID checks.

**What meal options are available?** What is served in the cafeteria? What's available when the cafeteria is closed?

**What kind of health facilities and services does the college offer?** 24-hour emergency care? Nearest hospital?

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### Take a Tour of Your Favorite College...

#### On campus...

- **Schedule an appointment.** Be ready with multiple dates and times. Avoid major events or holidays. Arrange to speak to other students, professors, the financial aid, admissions and career offices. Ask about a guided tour.
- **Stay overnight.** You can talk to other students and see what life on campus is really like.
- **Pack smart.** You may want to pack more casual clothes for when you walk around campus, and something more formal for an interview with the admissions office.
- **Take notes as you visit.** If you visit several colleges (especially in one day), the details can get blurry.
- **Go to a class.** Note class size, instructors, difficulty level.
- **View other campus buildings.** Check out residence hall rooms, cafeterias, computer labs, health and recreational facilities, the library, etc.

#### ...Or off campus

- **Research online.** Check out the college's website. Is there a virtual tour that you can take online?
- **Communicate with the college directly.** Call or e-mail the admissions and financial aid offices. Some colleges offer chatrooms. Write down the name of the person with whom you spoke.
- **College fairs.** Let colleges come to you. Ask your counselor about upcoming fairs and prepare some questions to ask the college's representative.
- **Use your personal network.** Talk to counselors, family members, siblings and friends and find someone who attended your prospective college. Ask about their experiences and impressions.