



TIPS ON WINNING SCHOLARSHIPS

Finding Scholarships

Where do you begin looking for scholarships? Absolutely everywhere! Tell everyone that you know that you are applying for scholarships. Word of mouth is such a powerful tool. We certainly are not privy to every single scholarship out there – there are thousands. However, through Family Connection, we are able to give you resources for many and places where you can look for more.

In addition to the resources we have, there are many free scholarship search sites. We must warn you that there are many national scholarships in these databases, many of which we have already accessed and researched. However, if you would like to sign up for these services, below is a list to get started:

www.fastweb.com

www.finaid.org/scholarships

www.scholarships.com

Scholarship Scams

Unfortunately, there are some organizations that offer scholarships but are more interested in duping students and their families. Here are some things to look for when trying to determine whether or not a scholarship is a scam.

- If you are required to pay money, even if it's just \$5, it is probably a scam. In fact, please report any scholarships you encounter requiring a fee.
- If you are told that you will be guaranteed a scholarship, it is probably a scam. No one can guarantee a scholarship except for the sponsors of the scholarship itself.
- If you are required to give a credit card number, it is probably a scam.
- If you are required to give your social security number, it is probably a scam.
- If you are required to give your bank account information, it is probably a scam.

Winning Scholarships

As you probably are already aware, winning scholarships is not an easy process. There is work involved, there's no two ways about it. However, the reward is well worth it. Imagine spending an hour or two working on a scholarship and getting a return of \$500 or more. Below are some tips on winning scholarships.

1. You will be facing competition. You are probably aware that there are different types of scholarships: academic/merit, athletic and financial need. Did you know there are different levels as well? Some scholarships are meant just for Westview, some are for Poway Unified School District. Then there are others, such as San Diego, California and national scholarships. The more advanced the level of scholarship, the more people will

be applying. If you are interested in less competitive opportunities, consider applying for local scholarships first. While there are still people who apply for these scholarships, there are far fewer applications. On the other hand, by not applying to some national scholarships, you do lose a lot of opportunities available to you that you may not find at the local level.

2. Read the directions. This seems like such a simple step, but many scholarship applications are not considered because of failure to completely follow the directions.

3. Be sure you meet the minimum eligibility criteria. Eligibility criteria is non-negotiable. If the requirement, for example, is that you must have a minimum 2.5 GPA and you have a 2.0, you are not eligible. They will not consider your application. Realize that some scholarship sponsors receive many applications and so they will be looking for ways to eliminate as many applications as possible. However, if you are close to qualifying, you might want to give it a try. Who knows, you may make it in.

4. Your essay should be compelling. Please read the section we have written on writing essays. You will find a lot of suggestions on writing something that will be more likely read.

5. Complete Your Application. If you are unsure how to complete an application, please ask someone for assistance. Skipping a question on your application is like skipping a question on a test, except you may have worse consequences in this situation. You can miss the opportunity for \$10,000 simply because you were not thorough.

- The presence of your application is vital as well. If you are able to type your application, it is more advisable than printing.
- The package you submit should look like you spent some time on your application and not just thrown together at the last minute.
- Keep copies of all the applications you submit. If there is ever a dispute that has arisen from the submission of one of your essays, you will have the information readily available. In addition, many applications ask the same types of questions. Having copies of previously submitted applications will help ease the process in completing future applications.

6. Learn About the Sponsor. Before you submit your application, learn what you can about the scholarship sponsor. There are many reasons that an organization would want to offer a scholarship: a way of giving back to the community, a way of honoring someone, recruitment, etc. Go to their website and look for their mission statement. Has what you have written and are about to submit fit into their core values? Do you think you would be a good representative for their organization if you were to win the scholarship?

7. Watch for Deadlines. If the application is due by July 31st, sending your application on August 1st is pointless. There may be legitimate reasons why you are late, but the deadlines are usually very firm. There is a danger in waiting until the last minute. You might feel rushed and produce a somewhat mediocre final product that otherwise may be

fantastic if you give yourself a little more breathing room. In addition, if your application requires an official transcript, realize that it takes four school days for processing at Westview.

Organize Your Search

Applying for scholarships can be overwhelming, between locating resources, writing your essay and completing the sometimes lengthy applications. Being just a little bit organized can really help in the process and actually make it easier to stay on top of deadlines.

To get you started on your scholarship hunt, we recommend that you get a binder or set up a filing system that will keep you on top of deadlines. In this binder, print out a copy of each scholarship you will consider pursuing. Then keep all of your application materials handy. As you submit your applications, keep copies of your documents and file them behind each scholarship. You might consider creating tabs for sections, such as:

- Due Dates
- Scholarships Submitted
- Letters of Recommendation Requests
- Transcript Requests

Preparing for Scholarships

You may be reading this as a freshman or sophomore and wonder how you can prepare yourself for the scholarships process. How do you stand out from the crowd? How will you get yourself noticed?

A common misconception some students have is that they must do as much community service and volunteer work as possible – the more the merrier. In fact, what colleges and scholarship organizations are looking for is consistency and quality. They would much rather see your dedication reserved to specific areas rather than haphazardly participating in every activity simply because it was available.

For example, assume that you are an active member of a club at school. Have you taken on a leadership position there, like being the President, Secretary or Treasurer? Is your community service related in some way to your goals after high school? Your interest in a particular area will have more meaning and certainly set you apart from other candidates.

Essays

A great majority of scholarships require essays of some sort. They may be just a paragraph in length or they may be several pages long. It just depends on the requirements of the sponsor. How do you feel about writing essays: do you enjoy English and like writing papers or do you imagine it as the worst thing you could possibly think of

and are hoping you can do scholarships without essays? Here are some tips to make the process less intimidating.

1. Consider why essays are necessary. First, let's look at why essays are requested from scholarship sponsors. Here are some key items to ponder:

- The scholarship committee is faced with a great amount of scholarship applications to wade through. Some scholarship sponsors may receive just a few applications, while others may receive a few thousand. The essay is a great opportunity for the scholarship committee to "meet" you on paper.
- Often times, scholarship sponsors are looking for more than just how well you may take tests, awesome grades and a list of your extracurricular activities.
- How you present yourself in an essay can leave such a wonderful impression that the judges reading your scholarship will want to know more about you or, even better, feel compelled to offer you a scholarship.

2. Ensure you have produced a well-written essay. The most important thing to think about when writing an essay is the fact that you really want the reader on the other side to know you through your writing. Consider the following components of a good essay:

1. The essay is your work.
2. The essay is engaging and interesting.
3. The essay is genuine and truthful.
4. The essay is straightforward and gets to the point.

When writing your essay, be yourself. They want to know about *you*, the high school student about to embark on the college experience. They want you to engage them in your life. Write about things you know, not hypothesizing about your philosophies of third world nations' governments (unless, of course, the scholarship sponsor asks you to do that). The passion you feel for the topic needs to come through in your essay.

3. Prepare for writing essays by completing some practice essays. Some students like to prepare for scholarships by writing essays during down time. Below are some sample essays taken from past scholarship applications. Keep in mind, however, that the topic of an essay depends on the requirements of each scholarship sponsor and is subject to change from year to year.

- Describe a major accomplishment in your life and why it is so important to you.
- What is your career goal and why have you chosen this path
- Describe your most important extracurricular activity and why it was important to you.
- What experiences have influenced your academic and community pursuits?
- What will you be studying in college and why have you selected this field?
- Have you faced any personal challenges or obstacles in your life?

4. Process of writing an essay. Writing essays for scholarships is not that different than writing essays for any class. Sure, the topic may be different, but the process is very

similar. You have a topic, you know that. You need to have supporting evidence to be convincing. It needs to look professional and it needs your utmost attention. Below are some tips for writing a great essay.

- **Be Original.** Sponsors are generally looking for essays that are memorable. This is where you get to look at being creative. Answer essay questions in a way that would be different from other students.
- **Brainstorming.** Spend some time brainstorming before writing your essay. Write key components you would like to include in your essay down on paper before organizing it all together, including specific examples supporting your ideas.
- **Have a Plan.** Outline your important points to ensure you have a proper flow in your essay. This will ensure that you have a plan you can follow to include everything you'd like to discuss without rambling.
- **The Look.**
 - Consider putting a title on your essay that is eye-catching.
 - Your introductory sentence should grab the reader's attention?
 - Your paragraphs should not be too long. You want to ensure that the reader will be interested in your work.
 - Type your essay, double-spaced with 1" margins on the paper.
 - If the scholarship sponsor has given you a maximum word count, make sure you have not exceeded that number. Some sponsors are willing to overlook something a little too short or a little too long, but there are no guarantees.
- **Prove Your Case.** Hopefully, if you've written a powerful essay, you have proven your case to the reader. Do your examples support the objective of the essay? Do you present yourself in an interesting, engaging manner? Would the reader want to spend time reading your essay or try to hurry along to get to the next one? Do your homework. Research the topic. If the sponsor posts winning essays from previous years, look at their work. Is your essay as competitive as someone who has won the scholarship in the past?
- **Should You Be Personal?** Sometimes students wonder if they are getting too personal in their essays. That is a judgment you must make. Sponsors do like to see that you can be open and honest. Just remember to keep yourself appropriate in what you write. If you have faced some particular adversity in your life, talk about how you have overcome it if applies to the essay topic.
- **You Should Shine.** If you have been involved in extensive extracurricular activities, volunteering or community service, discuss what leadership roles you have had within these activities. If you were president of the Key Club, talk about leadership responsibilities you undertook.
- **Being Thorough.** Does your essay address the specific request of the sponsor? If they are asking you to write about the person that has influenced you the most and you write about what your college major will be, you have not addressed their needs.
- **The Importance of Proofreading.** To ensure that you have the best possible chance at winning scholarships, it is critical that you proofread your application,

essays and other documents you are submitting. Even if you have written a fantastic essay, have other people read it. Have several people read it. Whomever reads your essays should be objective with you. If they see mistakes with your spelling, grammar or problems with the essay itself, they should feel comfortable enough to tell you. Ask them to give you suggestions on how you may improve. Let's face it – there's always room for improvement and wouldn't you want the opportunity to make changes if they are necessary?

Letters of Recommendations

Some scholarships require letters of recommendation. Do you know who you will ask and how you will ask? You will have to pick your recommenders very carefully as they may hold the key as to whether or not you will be awarded with a scholarship.

It does matter who you ask. Your letter of recommendation “speaks” about you in a way that leaves a lasting impression with committee members judging you for a scholarship. You should ask people to write a letter of recommendation who:

- Know you well (at least one year if possible)
- Are able to write well
- Have the time and willingness

Ideal people to write a letter of recommendation may include teachers, counselors, school staff who know you well, coaches, church members, employers and leaders in the community. People who should never write a letter of recommendation for you include any member of your family or one of your peers. This is a red flag to someone that you were not able to get a letter from someone who will be objective.

Contents of a letter of recommendation. Generally, each person writing your letter of recommendation has probably written one in the past so they will likely be familiar with the format. However, sometimes sponsors indicate what exactly they are looking for. You want to be careful not to tell your recommenders what to write, but to give them some guidelines. Here are some other things to think about:

- If the scholarship requests a specific number of letters of recommendation, do not send more or less.
- When you ask people to write a letter of recommendation for you, sit down with them and discuss the scholarship.
- It is common courtesy to give each person writing a letter of recommendation at least two weeks before the scholarship is due to complete their part. Anything earlier than two weeks is not respectful of the person's time. Most adults have responsibilities other than writing letters of recommendation; this is a favor to you! Remember that weekends and school holidays should not be included within the two week timeframe.

- Provide the people who will be writing your letter of recommendation with copies of your resume/brag sheet, scholarship requirements and an addressed stamped envelope for them to send the recommendation.
- Consider reminding writers about a week before the letters are due.
- You should not be given a copy of the letter. It could compromise your ability to win the scholarship.
- As a courtesy, send each writer a thank you note. This expresses your gratitude for the time the recommender took to help you with the scholarship.

Resume

A resume will give a scholarship committee a good look at your achievements, activities and experience beyond what you submit in your application. In addition, if someone is writing a letter of recommendation for you, a resume will give them your entire background, not just how they know you from a class or event. Our Westview Scholarship Committee appreciates the effort a student puts forward when submitting a scholarship application with a resume, even if it was not requested. Be careful, though: do not submit a resume with your application if the sponsor specifically requests that you not send additional documents.

How to Write a Resume. There are several components to any resume, whether the purpose is to find a job, securing an internship or obtaining a scholarship. When writing your resume, consider the person who will be reading it. If a scholarship sponsor is looking for someone with a certain number of hours doing community service, make sure that your community service list is complete. The presentation of your resume is often times a key component as to whether or not you will be considered for a scholarship. Consider including the following items in your resume. Family Connection does have a component that will help you build your resume if you have not written one before.

Accomplishments. Include a list of your accomplishments, which may contain things such as participation in a club at school, playing a sport, teaching Sunday school or anything else that you may consider an accomplishment. You will want to include any leadership or other positions held.

Community Service/Volunteer Activities. Include a list of all your community service and volunteer activities. You may want to consider putting in a very brief description of what you did with each activity.

Work Experience. If you have worked while in high school, include this information on the resume. You will want to indicate the name of the company and the position held.

Interviews

So you've completed your essay, mailed in your application and now you're feeling like it's smooth sailing from here on out, right? Not necessarily so! Some scholarships require a personal interview. The reason is that perhaps several finalists were chosen and the scholarship committee would like to get to know you better before selecting the winner.

During the Interview

- Be able to speak further about the topic you discussed in your written essay. You may be asked questions for further clarification.
- Be able to be engaged enough to have a conversation with the interviewer that flows easily.
- Dress professionally.

Relax, they are people, too. An interview can be intimidating, especially when you have potential award money on the line. Think about this as an opportunity to talk more about your essay and perhaps talk about related subjects. To make the experience more worthwhile, you may want to consider practicing with someone else informally before the interview.