



College Planning

Make Your Scholarship Essay Stand Out

(NAPSA)—There could be good news for many students. Plenty of generous people and organizations donate each year to scholarship funds that help Americans meet their educational goals. Aspiring students can easily learn where and how to apply by visiting sites such as ScholarshipAmerica.org.

A critical part of the application process is often a personal essay on a single, weighty topic: Who has influenced you the most and why? Why do you want to be in your selected profession? Ten years from today, where do you see yourself? and the like.

Before you even think about opening up a Word doc, though, you may care to heed this advice to help you avoid essay mistakes:

1. Don't rush. Good writing requires time and clear focus. With school, friends and extracurricular activities competing for a share of your life, it's easy to push that scholarship essay aside until the last minute. Bad idea. Start the essay long before it's due, put some time aside to work on it a little each night or on the weekends, and remember: The best writing is rewriting. Schedule time to revise.

2. Know your audience. Some scholarship funds like an upbeat essay, others prefer a formal voice. You won't know until you do a little research. Go to the sponsoring organization's website and read its mission, history and programs. You'll get a sense of the organization's "personality," which will help you tailor your essay to fit what reviewers want.

3. Obey the rules of good writing. You can get away with broken English when you're texting or chatting with friends but it won't work for your essay. Scholarships want to give \$ to smart peeps and writing like this makes you look like you don't care. So write in English not in text and use proper grammar and punctuation. K? :)

4. Be interesting. Scholarship reviewers read hundreds, sometimes thousands of essays



Getting scholarship money may be easier when you know the "write" way to go about it.

every year. So yours needs to stand out. Answering the question is a must, but so is creativity. Don't fill space with superficial and predictable information. Use images, examples, anecdotes and other storytelling techniques to make your writing richer. Consider this example: "My father inspires me because he puts his life on the line daily as a Chicago police officer." Compare that to this essay opening: "Every day at 5 a.m. sharp, Dad rolls quietly out of bed, puts on his police uniform and carefully buckles his gun belt around his waist. Meanwhile, Mom starts her day with a prayer that Dad will come home safely from the streets of Chicago."

5. Read it out loud. People learn language by hearing it, so the clearest voice is close to conversational. Instead of simply using your eyes when you revise, employ your ears as well. With a pen-and-paper copy in hand, read your entire essay aloud, jotting changes as needed. By hearing how the document flows, you can catch clunky sentences and eliminate those pesky grammar mistakes that your eyes might overlook.

6. Get a second opinion. See if your school has a writing center where you can get advice on your essay. Take advantage of these resources. Or e-mail your essay to your parents or other trusted advisers. A fresh set of eyes can prevent a big mistake.