

The Scholarship Yooper

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He's from the U. P.!

THE DREADED SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY

Writing essays is one of the main issues that steers people away from applying for scholarships. Some of the essays are required to be too long, others are passed up because the prompts are too complex and difficult to answer. However when written correctly, scholarship essays can be used to your advantage. They are the easiest way to set yourself apart from hundreds of other applicants, making them crucial to getting you on the path to winning scholarships.

So where do you start? One of the most intimidating parts of a scholarship application is staring down a 1000 or 2000 minimum word requirement. However, don't let this dissuade you. To start, begin listing some ideas to the prompt. If the question, "What extracurricular activity has influenced you most?" pops up, start by listing some of your favorite activities which could be anything from basketball to National Honor Society. This is the brainstorming stage, where you throw whatever ideas you have onto a page, with no erasing. After you come up with different ways to approach the essay, it is time to whittle down your options.

To start narrowing down the ways to answer the prompt, start making subpoints under your favorite activities. Maybe in basketball you injured your knee and had to motivate yourself to rehab and come back stronger. Maybe National Honor Society is where you discovered your passion for helping others and giving back to your community. In this section, you want to find out how much support you have behind each idea.



Now start crossing some options out, and also circle some of your favorites. Which option can you write the most on? Which option has not only influenced you, but has made you a better person in the process? Once you have finally found the topic your essay will be centered on, congratulations! You have finished the brainstorming stage.

THE WRITING STAGE

When you decide on your topic, you want to outline the subpoints you will cover. For example, if you picked basketball, you might pick three ways that it has influenced you. After you create this outline, take about 30-45 minutes to write out your ideas. Write as much as you can, and try not to go back and worry about errors. This stage will help you get a base for your essay, and eventually you will come back and make corrections and additions.

After you complete the outline, now you can go back and start making changes. In this step, you want to add more personal examples and try your best to tell why your story is unique. Many scholarship application questions are answered in the same way. "What I learned from basketball was teamwork." This is an example of a very generic answer. Think about how many people might respond with this exact phrase. No scholarship judge wants to read the same information repeatedly. Therefore, you should add a personal twist to the scholarship. "During basketball I learned that to be successful, even the best players must give up their personal gain for the team's goals. I learned this in the state semi-finals when my team used teamwork and unselfish play to beat a team with much more natural talent in the final seconds." This is also the point where I like to go back and look at the introduction and conclusion.

Your introduction should be visual and help engage the reader. When a scholarship committee is looking at hundreds of essays, your introduction will be crucial to setting your essay apart. Your introduction should also briefly explain the outline of your body paragraphs. A personal tip I use is to model my conclusion after my introduction. I connect them to each other by planting a similar image from the introduction in the conclusion. Your conclusion should summarize your body paragraphs and explain why they matter to the essay prompt. After this stage, your essay should flow from start to finish.

Next begins the fine-editing stage. This is where you change words from “hard” to “grueling” and from “I want to” to “I am determined to.” In scholarship essays, I try to stay away from what I “might do.” I try to show what I will be doing. I “will” be a physical therapist, I “will” become an entrepreneur. When you say “I will,” that is showing that you have the drive required to obtain the goals you set for yourself. Most scholarships are looking for a motivated and driven individual who is focused on their goals. In this section, the small tuning of common words to visual and engaging words can make all the difference.



Understand who the scholarship donor is and write to their values and missions.

Now that you completed the essay, this is where you turn to others for help. I was lucky enough to have a mom and dad that looked over my scholarship essays. While my mom works as a nurse, she must also be a secret book editor on the side. She is the best at picking out major errors where I got off topic, shared useless information, or added details that really didn't help support my essay. On the other hand, my dad is an auto-mechanic but also a fine-detail grammar specialist. He would rarely ask me about my big ideas, instead focusing on flow and word choice. I was lucky enough to have two personal editors living at my house.

Thankfully, here at UWL you are lucky enough to have free-personal editors living in your dorms and working at the library. Ask your friends in your dorm or go to the Writing Center at Murphy Library where they will help you with any part of the scholarship writing process for free. These edits can mean the difference between you going home empty handed and adding at least a couple hundred dollars to your pocket.



UTILIZING THE SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY

The scholarship essay should be utilized to set your application apart from the large amount the scholarship committee must review. An amazing benefit to writing scholarship essays is that if you work hard on one, you can use that essay and pieces of it to help write others. Use your essay to exhibit your passion and make sure you don't sugarcoat how great you are. The scholarship essay is vital to winning some free money. Use it!