

Scholarship Essay Presentation – Friday, February 20, 2004
Given by Jesse Cunningham, English Center Tutor, SD City College

Tips for Writing the All-Important Scholarship Essay & Other Advice
Adapted from the University of Michigan at Dearborn Women's Resource Center:
<http://www.umd.umich.edu/womenscenter/essay%20tips.htm>

Below is a suggested outline of a scholarship essay. Always start out by brainstorming. Jot down some notes on your personal history. Then write down your goals and how you are going to achieve them. Use these notes to refine into a scholarship essay, by touching on the following topics:

1. Begin the essay by telling where you are currently attending school and what year you are in;
2. Provide a brief story of your life, focusing on obstacles you have faced and how you overcame them, why you have a financial need, and why you are returning to school now (if you are a returning student);
3. Describe achievements that you are proud of - highlight your skills and abilities;
4. Discuss what you want to do once you have finished your education. Include your dreams and hopes, and describe the type of job you hope to have;
5. Describe what you hope to contribute to the community once you graduate, and why; describe how your skills and education will assist others;
6. Discuss your current economic situation and why you need financial help at this time to attend school;
7. End your essay by thanking the scholarship committee, foundation, or corporation for making this opportunity available and for taking time to read your application.

Writing the Essay, Tips for Success

Adapted from the following website: <http://palmahs.org/hs/guidance/pdf/essayhelppacketshort.pdf>

Answer the Question: if the scholarships for which you are applying have particular topic guidelines, be sure to address them.

Be Original and Be Yourself: discuss topics that you are passionate about and that show your individuality.

Use Imagery and Clear, Vivid Prose: the application essay lends itself to imagery since the entire essay requires your experiences as supporting details. Appeal to the five senses of the scholarship officers.

Organize Your Essay:

- Make your introduction interesting – make an impression
- Relate the body paragraphs to the introduction

- Use transitions between ideas (between *and* within paragraphs)
- Make your conclusion interesting – leave a lasting impression (don't just summarize)

Revise, Revise, Revise:

- Allow for the evolution of your main topic. Do not assume your subject must remain fixed and that you can only tweak sentences.
- Editing takes time. Consider reordering your supporting details, delete irrelevant sections, and make clear the broader implications of your experiences. Allow your more important arguments to come to the foreground. Take points that might only be implicit and make them explicit.
- Look at the small stuff. Make sure your essay is neat, contains no grammar or spelling errors, and has the requested information at the top (e.g., your name, social security number).
- Visit the English Center (C226) for assistance with grammar, organization, and development. Come prepared; bring any information about the scholarship. Be open to suggestions from your tutor. Come early, and come often.

Visiting the English Center – C226

Come Early: A good scholarship essay (or any essay for that matter) takes time to refine. Start your essays early so that you have plenty of time to revise them and the opportunity to visit the English Center more than once. Remember: tutorial sessions last around 30 minutes each. This is enough time to tackle a handful of important issues, but good writers know that they sometimes have to return for multiple visits. Don't wait until the last minute to get feedback.

Be Prepared: Bring any application materials, writing prompts or guidelines, or anything else that will help the tutor help you write the best essay possible. Come with a pen, a draft of your essay or brainstorm, and something to take notes on. Be prepared to communicate with your tutor about your concerns and questions.

Hours: Monday and Tuesday – 9:00 – 7:00, Wednesday and Thursday – 9:00 – 6:00. You don't need to make an appointment; all tutoring is done on a walk-in basis.

Letters of Recommendation

Sometimes scholarship applications require you to include letters of recommendation from professors. When approaching your professor, be sure to be professional and prepared. If the application includes any guidelines for the letters of recommendation, mention them to your professors. You may want to write a memo to them explaining a little about the scholarship, why you are an appropriate recipient of such a scholarship, and what they can add about your work in their classes that would complement your application. You may also want to supply them with a draft of your personal statement. Visit your professors in their office hours or after class privately. Approach professors in whose classes you have performed particularly well; they will be better able to attest to your dedication and focus as a student. As with the essay, begin this process early.



SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION and ESSAY TIPS

Compliments of the San Diego City College Scholarships Office, Room D-106

Scholarships are available year round and deadlines are sometimes a couple of days away. It takes time to prepare your scholarship application so here are a few suggestions:

- You are responsible for making sure that ALL parts of the application arrive on time. If letters of recommendation or transcripts are required, give the individuals who will be providing these documents to you enough time.
- **Transcripts** - Have a couple of current transcript copies available at all times.
- **Letters of Recommendation** - Request letters of recommendation at different times through the year so you always have current dates available. Some scholarships accept letters dated up to six months old.
- Make sure the people you ask to prepare your letters of recommendation know you well.
- **Community and volunteer service** are a key component in many scholarships and you need to request a verification letter from the agency you volunteer at stating how long you have been a volunteer or an equivalent in number of hours completed. Scholarship review committees are interested in what service you have performed in your community, school or church.
- Remember, your scholarship application represents YOU!
- Give your application time, attention, and the preparation that it deserves.
- **WATCH DEADLINES** - financial aid offices and scholarship personnel have DEADLINES TOO!
- Read and follow the instructions carefully.
- Type or print neatly.
- Don't leave any questions blank.
- Proofread your work - especially your personal statement. Be specific and answer all of the questions you're asked. Also, be personal. It's your job to make your essay stand out from the rest. Check the spelling and grammar. Ask a parent, friend, or teacher to proofread your completed application.
- **MAKE A COPY OF THE COMPLETE APPLICATION FOR YOUR FILE.**
- Finally - keep a written record of all scholarships for which you applied. Make a note of the deadlines, requirements, and responses.

ESSAY TIPS

The essay/personal statement is probably the most difficult part of your scholarship application to complete. However, it's also the part of your application where you can shine and stand out from the rest of the crowd. Scholarship selection committees review hundreds of personal statements and it's your job to get their attention when they read your essay. The key to writing a strong personal statement is to be specific and include personal details about yourself so the reader can get to know who you are and what you stand for. Be truthful and honest. Here are a few helpful tips:

- ❑ Be aware that an essay/personal statement may be required as part of the scholarship applications. Do not delay in writing your statement. Begin early.
- ❑ Create a portrait of a winner. By doing this on paper, you'll create a vivid portrait of yourself and who you are behind the grades, activities and awards. If a committee member feels like he/she knows you from reading your essay, you'll have done your job by creating a powerful emotional connection that elevates your application and makes it stand out from the others.
- ❑ Read the title carefully; think before you write. Brainstorm to generate some good ideas and then create an outline to help you get going. Be sure that if you have specific questions to address that you answer them clearly.
- ❑ Discuss your career goals.
- ❑ Demonstrate interest and confidence.
- ❑ Include information on your background.
- ❑ Include your academic achievements and why you should receive the scholarship.
- ❑ Include personal matters such as financial need, future plans, things you are interested in.
- ❑ Include the things that are important in your life.
- ❑ Be original and be creative in your answers.
- ❑ Be brief, clear and honest.
- ❑ Show, don't tell. Use examples to individualize your essay and demonstrate the point you want to make. You'll avoid vagueness and make a stronger impression.
- ❑ Know your audience. Personal statements are not 'one size fits all'. Write an essay that fits the requirements of the organization.
- ❑ **Special Circumstances** - If you have overcome an obstacle to achieve your goals or have encountered a special circumstance, the scholarship selection committee members want to know about it. Let them know how you have achieved all that you have in spite of roadblocks you may have faced.
- ❑ Neatness counts. Make sure your personal statement is typed.
- ❑ Proofread! Proofread! Proofread! This is very important because you don't want to have any typos on your essay. Check your spelling and grammar and ask your parents, teachers or friends to review your essay. Another "pair of eyes" can catch errors you might have missed!