

## Scholarship Guide

### Master the Basics

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#### Where to start

- **Go online** and take advantage of free scholarship matching services such as [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com) for local, regional, state, national awards and college-specific scholarships.
- **Ask** your school guidance counselor about local, private and corporate sponsorships.
- **Search** your community. There are many philanthropic and non-profit organizations that may offer awards. Visit your school or local public library to research scholarships. Ask your parents' employers and unions if they sponsor scholarships for children of employees.

#### How to prepare

- **Get organized** and keep the scholarships you are working on separate from those you have not started. Use a calendar to keep track of dates and deadlines or the status tool available on [Fastweb](#).
- **Know your time frame to apply.** Complete and submit the easiest scholarships first. Then focus on the scholarships with earlier deadlines and ones that may require more time. Allow plenty of time when requesting letters of recommendation.

#### Submit your application

- **Remember** to check your spelling and grammar.
- **Proofread your materials** and have a teacher, parent or friend review your application and essay if submitting online or by mail. They can provide feedback and catch mistakes.
- **Keep a copy** of your application, if you submitted paper or electronic copy.

### The Scholarship Essay/Application

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#### Before you begin:

- Develop a theme that fits the scholarship. Learn about the scholarship provider's mission and goals. Tailor your essay/application to complement the sponsor's expectations. For example, if the provider is interested in community service, highlight ways you impact your campus community and your community at large within your essay. Here are a few topic ideas:

#### Personal achievements

- Talk about specific interactions you had with others. Sponsors want to know the impact you had on others and what this says about "you". Do you still keep in touch with anyone you've helped? How did you influence their lives?
- How did your achievements reflect your values? Why are your achievements important to you? Did you do something that received high praise or recognition?
- Personalize your experience. For example, what makes the volunteer and community service you've performed unique? What made you stand out?

#### Academic plans and possible major

- Instead of saying, "Science is my favorite subject," discuss a *specific* assignment or project that you worked on that sparked your interest. Give examples.
- 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 how your values are relevant to what you will be studying in college.

#### Social issues and current events

- 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?

#### Mentors, admirers and influences

- 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.
- Is there a person you aspire to be like within your chosen academic major or career path? Someone who encouraged you to succeed?
- Focus on specific qualities or actions that the person has inspired in you.

### What Do Judges or Evaluators Look For?

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**Do you qualify?** Every year, students waste time by applying for awards they aren't eligible to win. If you don't meet the eligibility criteria, don't enter!

**Is your application presented well?** Type your essay and check for grammar and spelling errors. Place the application, essay and other contents in a large folder for mailing. Do not fold any of the materials.

**Did you include all required documents?** Make sure you include all required academic transcripts, references and letters of recommendation. When selecting individuals to provide you a letter of recommendation, be sure you know them very well and give them ample time to provide you a letter and provide them a self addressed stamped envelope, if it will be mailed.

**Did you answer all of the questions?** Double-check that you haven't forgotten any required information.

### Tips for Applying for and Managing the Scholarship Search

- Start searching for scholarships as soon as possible. There are many scholarships available to students in grades K-11, so don't wait until spring of your senior year. Continue searching for scholarships even after you are enrolled.
- Use a free scholarship matching such as Fastweb.com. The Fastweb database is updated daily and the site will email notifications of new scholarships that match your profile.
- Answer all of the optional questions on a scholarship matching web site to create as many matches as available.
- Look for local scholarships on bulletin boards near the guidance counselor or financial aid offices, or the library's jobs and careers section. Improve grades for more matches.
- To win more scholarships, apply to every scholarship for which you are eligible. It gets easier after several applications. Also, pursue small awards and essay contests. Essays can be reused and tailored to each new application.
- Don't miss deadlines. Use checklists to get organized.
- Tailor your application to the sponsor's goals. Read and follow the instructions carefully.
- If you have difficulty writing essays, record yourself as you answer the question out loud and transcribe the recording. Most people think and speak faster than they can write or type. Write an outline afterward to organize your thoughts.
- Personalize your essay and be passionate. Write about something of interest to you. Make your application stand out from the crowd, talk about your impact on other people and give specific examples.
- Check your online presence to ensure that it looks professional. Review your social media profiles and remove inappropriate and immature material. Use a simple email address, such as [firstname.lastname@gmail.com](mailto:firstname.lastname@gmail.com).
- Proofread a printed copy of your essay and the application for spelling and grammar errors.
- Make a copy of your application before mailing it. Send by certified mail, return receipt or with delivery confirmation.

### Common Scholarship Application Mistakes

- Missing deadlines
- Failing to proofread the application
- Failing to follow directions, especially regarding essay length and the number of recommendations
- Omitting required information
- Applying for an award when you don't qualify
- Failing to apply for an award for which you are eligible
- Failing to tailor the application to the sponsor
- Writing a boring essay
- Writing an essay that may offend the reviewer
- Including exaggerations or lies on your application

### Beware of Scholarship Scams

- If you have to pay money to get money, it's probably a scam.
- Never invest more than a postage stamp to get information about scholarships or to apply for a scholarship.
- Nobody can guarantee that you'll win a scholarship.
- Do not give out personal information like bank account, credit card or Social Security numbers.
- Beware of the unclaimed aid myth. The only money that goes unclaimed is money that can't be claimed

### Essential Scholarship Resources

- Fastweb Free Scholarship Matching Service: [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)
- FinAid's Scholarships Section: [www.finaid.org/scholarships](http://www.finaid.org/scholarships)
- Search for Scholarships on the Web: [www.finaid.org/websearch](http://www.finaid.org/websearch)
- Beware of Scholarship Scams: [www.finaid.org/scholarshipscams](http://www.finaid.org/scholarshipscams) and [www.ftc.gov/scholarshipscams](http://www.ftc.gov/scholarshipscams)
- Education Tax Benefits: [www.finaid.org/taxbenefits](http://www.finaid.org/taxbenefits) and [www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p970.pdf](http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p970.pdf)
- Federal Student Financial Aid: [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)