

## Tips for Writing a Scholarship Personal Essay

The personal essay is your chance to write about yourself in the first person to help the evaluator understand who you are and why you deserve to receive a scholarship.

You want to stand out from the rest of the applicants, but not for the wrong reasons.

The personal essay can help you clarify your goals and how you want to achieve them.

Your personal essay should present a picture of you as a person, a student and a potential scholarship recipient. It is an opportunity to share your story.

### *Getting Started*

To begin your essay, brainstorm using some or all of the following questions. Jot down your answers on a sheet of paper as you think of them. Don't worry about organizing your thoughts at this time.

- What are your career aspirations?
- What are your short-term goals for your career?
- What has led you to embrace your future goals?
- What makes you care about these goals right now?
- Why are you interested in a particular program of study?
- What experiences or things have stimulated and reinforced your interest in this field?
- What skills or characteristics do you possess that would enhance your chances for success in this field?
- How do your personal traits make you an ideal candidate for the scholarship?
- Why should a scholarship committee be interested in you?
- How do you spend your time?
- What accomplishments are you proud of?
- How will the scholarship help you achieve your personal goals?
- What has compelled you to attend this college?

### *Writing Your Rough Draft*

Most good personal essays share three core elements:

1. They share your goals with others and show you have a sense of purpose.
2. They connect your goals with the opportunities the college or the scholarship provides.
3. They share your story and how your life experiences have formed and shaped your goals and how you have prepared for your goals.

Based on the ideas generated in your brainstorming, write a rough draft that presents telling details about your life in a logical narrative order. Don't worry about grammatical issues, wording or word count. Just get your ideas written out.

Develop a logical narrative thread that will tie the paragraphs together. Here are a couple of samples to illustrate:

#### *Sample One*

1. I hope to do X in my career.
2. A was my first encounter with X.
3. B and C confirmed my desire to work in X.
4. I believe your opportunity will help me accomplish X because...
5. I feel that D and E have prepared me for this opportunity.

### *Sample Two*

1. I experienced A recently.
2. It changed my mind about career X.
3. It got me thinking about career Y.
4. B and C confirmed that Y was right for me.
5. D and E will prove valuable even though they were related to X.
6. Your opportunity is the right next step because...

### *Evaluating Your Rough Draft(s)*

As you evaluate your rough draft, be sure you touched on the objectives of the scholarship, that it flows smoothly from idea-to-idea and paragraph-to-paragraph.

Write your opening sentence(s) after you have written the majority of your essay. Based on the body of your essay, think of a relevant short story, statement or borrowed quote. Your opening should grab the reader's attention while offering a unique and memorable piece of information about you. Make sure it is relevant and leads naturally into the rest of the essay.

Some other questions you might ask while evaluating your essay:

- Is it a positive portrayal of who you are? Is it upbeat and confident?
- Is it an honest portrayal?
- Have you answered all the questions thoroughly?
- Does the essay provide insight into your character?
- Has anything relevant been omitted? Work or academic experience?

Read through your essay multiple times, making revisions and editing out unnecessary or irrelevant details. Check that the general layout is to your liking and reads smoothly.

Find places where you can make it more interesting by adding unique details or short stories that illustrate who you are or how or why you qualify for the scholarship.

### *Final Polishing and Proofreading*

Try not to fall in love with your first draft because it is probably not your best effort.

Proofread your final essay for spelling, grammatical errors and other technical violations.

Edit to remove unnecessary or irrelevant words, phrases and sentences until it meets the word count or page limitations. If the scholarship instructions indicate the essay should be limited to a single sheet of paper or 600 words, then you need to abide by these instructions.

Set your essay aside for a few days. Proofread it again from a refreshed mindset

Ask another person to proofread it for you and offer editorial comments. "Looks good" is not actually helpful.

Sweat over the editing. Worry about word choice and word economy until you are happy with the content overall.

### *Some Additional Tips and Suggestion for Success*

**DO** start early. Leave plenty of time to revise, record, and rewrite. You can improve on your presentation.

**DO** read the directions carefully. You will want to answer the question as directly as possible, and you'll want to follow word limits exactly. Express yourself as briefly and as clearly as you can.

**DO** tell the truth about yourself.

**DO** focus on an aspect of yourself that will show your best side. You might have overcome some adversity, worked through a difficult project, or profited from a specific incident. A narrow focus is more interesting than broad-based generalizations.

**DO** tie yourself to the college. Be specific about what this particular school can do for you.

**DO** speak positively. Negatives tend to turn people off.

**DO** write about your greatest assets and achievements. You should be proud of them!

**BUT. . . .**

**DON'T** repeat information given elsewhere on your application. The committee has already seen it—and it looks as though you have nothing better to say.

**DON'T** write in general, impersonal terms. The college wants to know about you.

**DON'T** start your essay with "I have always wanted to be a...". Scholarship committees see thousands of these opening paragraphs.

**DON'T** use the personal statement to excuse your shortcomings. It would give them additional attention.

**DON'T** use clichés.

**DON'T** go to extremes: too witty, too opinionated, or too "intellectual."

**Remember:**

The personal statement is yours. If it looks like Madison Avenue, the scholarship committee will probably assume that it is your mother's or your father's or someone else wrote it.

A "gimmick" essay rarely goes anywhere. The committee is amused, but unimpressed with your candidacy.

Write a serious essay, from the bottom of your heart, in the most mature manner possible.

Proofread or better yet, have a knowledgeable person proofread for you.

Be sure your essay has complete sentences, natural and specific details and style, correct grammar, correct spelling.

**YOU CAN DO A GREAT JOB! SO GET STARTED!**

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*This guide is a compilation of information from the following sources:*

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