

Writing Scholarship Essays

What is the process?

1. Brainstorm
2. Select Main Topic(s)
3. Make an Outline
4. Write the Essay
5. Revise



Step 1: Brainstorm

Make a list of topics, a flow chart...whatever helps you organize possible ideas. Here are some questions to get you started...

- What are some of your major accomplishments? These do not have to be formal awards—they can be anything meaningful to you. Why do you consider them major accomplishments?
- Besides academics, what else have you done that shows strong character? Why is it important to you?
- Have you had a particularly difficult time in your life? How did you change because of it?
- What distinguishes you from others? Talents, qualities, etc.
- Have you ever struggled or fought for something? Did you succeed or fail? How did you grow because of it?

Step 2: Selecting a Topic

Now that you have brainstormed some ideas, how can you narrow them down?

- ANSWER THE QUESTION! Often, prompts give specific guidelines for what you should write about. Use them.
- Research the organization providing the scholarship. Sometimes, but not always, you may want to pick a topic that reflects values of particular career paths.
- Do not turn your essay into a sob story. Foundations want to award you because of your merits and your potential to do great things! What have you done despite the struggles you have faced?
- What best represents you as a unique individual?

Step 3: Make an Outline

- What is the main point of your essay? Like any other essay you write for school, your scholarship essay should have a thesis statement and you should use the rest of your essay to support this point.
- Consider the people who are reading your essays. They could be reading hundreds of essays! If you want to get their attention, you have to do it in the introduction. How can you spark their interest so they want to read on?
- Make sure each paragraph flows nicely into the next. Using good transitions can help. This includes transition words, repeating key phrases, etc. And remember, make sure your paragraphs support your main point, or thesis.

Step 4: Write the Essay

- You want to stand out; make the judge remember you!
- Make sure you convey what is unique about you. A reader should be able to get an idea of your personality and who you are from your essay.
- Be creative in your essay structure- but not too silly or so crazy that it is distracting.
- Use lots of imagery- don't just tell them what you did, show them through clear but descriptive details.
- Remember from Step 3, your body paragraphs must relate back to and support your introduction and thesis.
- Your conclusion is your last chance to show why you deserve this scholarship—but don't use all of this time to summarize what you just said. Often the scholarship essays are short, so you do not have to keep repeating things you just said a paragraph ago.

Step 5: Revise

- Have at least 3 people look at your essay: someone who knows you, someone who doesn't know you very well, and someone to check for grammar. If you have the time, ask them the following...
 - What do you think the essay is about? (**Does this match up with what you wanted to say? If not, how can you change and clarify your point?)
 - Is the introduction interesting?
 - Do the paragraphs transition well into each other?
 - Does the imagery and details help make the essay clearer or more confusing?
 - What is confusing? What does not relate to the rest of essay or the main point?
 - What is really good?
 - What does this essay tell you about me?
- Remember to get started on this process early. Sometime it helps to not look at your essay for a couple of days and then come back to it with fresh eyes. You will catch more mistakes this way. Give yourself time to do this.
- Grammar and spelling are important!

