

## What Does it Take to Write Your Way to College? How to Organize an Admissions/Scholarship Essay

1. Have some **sample paragraphs** ready that you can cut and paste (or easily edit) for various applications. Colleges will ask you a variety of questions depending upon the university. For scholarships, each application will require different answers depending upon the organization granting the scholarship. Some scholarships are based on academics, faith, volunteer experience, etc. Some topics you must be prepared to write about:
  - a. Your school/homeschool experience
    - i. How did it prepare you for your future?
    - ii. What life lessons can you carry forward?
  - b. Your faith experience
    - i. Summarize your religious experience. (Did you go to church growing up? Do you attend weekly? Do you go as a family?)
    - ii. How has your faith grown through the years?
    - iii. How will you live out your faith during your college years?
  - c. Your volunteer experiences (church, community, scouts, etc.). You have probably volunteered in more places than you realize. Did you help out at VBS? Help organize a car wash? Play the piano for free at a community event? Help a volunteer coach with younger players?
  - d. Your experiences centered around your career goals
    - i. Have you had an internship related to the field you are hoping to major in?
    - ii. Have you taken specific classes that led you to your career decisions/college major?
    - iii. Have you had a mentor that guided you as you chose a possible major?
  - e. Extracurricular activities (band, scouts, sports, art camps, choir, yearbook staff, horseback riding, writing, book clubs, etc.).
  - f. What are your career goals?
  - g. How will this scholarship help you? Be prepared to talk about your family's financial needs.
2. Read the questions/applications and only give answers for what you are being asked. No matter how good you think your essay sounds, if it does not specifically answer the question and stick to the topic at hand, your readers will not move your application forward.
3. Proofread/edit everything you send in. Have someone else read through it if possible.
4. Know where to look for scholarships (never pay for this information).
  - a. Start with the school you are applying for (the Financial Aid office).
  - b. Look at organizations you have volunteered for (at the local and national level). Don't be shy about asking organizers/leaders.
  - c. Check out your church/denomination. Look at the local and national level if possible.
  - d. Look at organizations related to your extracurricular activities. Google "scholarships for \_\_\_\_ (scouts, bowlers, piano players, etc.). You will be surprised that you can find a few this way.
  - e. Check out websites that are free to use. Some of these have thousand listed. It takes time to find the ones worth applying for, but every dollar adds up. Try for the smaller scholarships as well as the larger one. Four \$500 scholarships go a long way if you get them. And it's ok to apply for some that are just "drawings" and not based on achievements.
    - i. <http://www.fastweb.com/>
    - ii. <https://colleges.niche.com/>
    - iii. <https://www.unigo.com/scholarships/match>

- Be yourself and keep the focus on you. Don't try to sound impressive or sound like a professional. Be who you are at the time you are writing the essay.
- Think of some unique things along with your "average" things you do in life. Do you have a larger than usual family that has taught you to be really organized with large group activities? Have you traveled to some unique places? Do you have a unique hobby or job? Have you moved a lot? Unique does not have to mean something no one else has done—it just gives you something out of the ordinary to talk about with your life experiences.
- Mundane things can be important. Sometimes the simple things can stand out. Did you ride to school every morning with your siblings and quiz each other or sing together? Did your family hike together every summer? Simple things can show that you learned wonderful life lessons.
- Don't try to fit every single thing into an essay. It will read too much like a list. Pick three or four thoughts that answer the questions and elaborate on those thoughts with specific details. Make the answer flow like a story rather than read like a list.
- Don't share controversial opinions. You don't know who your readers will be. You can talk about your faith, but don't be judgmental against others since a reader may not share the same faith. Avoid most political topics. You can mention activities you participated in if they were political in nature, but don't base your essays on the politics.
- Don't use informal abbreviations even if you are applying online. This is not a text to a friend or a casual e-mail.
- Write in a word-processing program and paste into the boxes if you are applying online. Not all online applications will catch spelling errors.