

Checklist for Submitting Applications and Essays

Whether you are completing a multi-page college application, or writing a 500-word scholarship essay, the task can be intimidating. So here are a few hints we have compiled to make the process smoother and ease your anxieties.

Completing the Application

- Read the entire application, making notes of important points.
- Make a copy of the original application so that you can use it as a working application.
- Follow the directions exactly. If no color of ink is specified, use black. If handwriting or typing is not specified, type. Neatness counts. Remember to sign the application if they request you to do so.
- Make sure you enclose everything the application requests i.e., fees, application fees, recommendations, transcripts, OR you can make arrangements for these items to be sent. Do not include anything that is not specified.
- If the application asks for hours involved in a project, do not write, “varies.” This means nothing to the selection committee. Estimate the hours as accurately as you can. If the scholarship asks for total hours, do not give weekly or monthly hours, give total hours.
- Do not use acronyms until you have used the entire title once, with the acronym in parentheses.
- Check the date of the deadline and the day of the week on which it falls. Mail in the application well before the deadline. Find out when the schools begin to accept students’ applications. The earlier you mail it in the better.

Receiving Recommendations

- Be sure to ask early for any needed letters of recommendation. The more information you can provide the writer (ie resume, personal goal statement, type of scholarship you are applying for and/or college), the better they can write a letter to meet your needs.
- If you need a recommendation, ask a teacher or counselor who knows you personally and is willing to write the recommendation. Provide this person with requested information well in advance and ask them for a deadline.
- Be sure to give the person submitting a recommendation for you a stamped envelope addressed to the college where it is to be sent.

- Before the deadline, follow-up with the person submitting your recommendation to assure that it is turned in on time.

Organizing your Applications

- Keep a copy of the final application for your records.
- Create a separate file folder for each school or scholarship to which you are considering applying.
- Keep copies of all your application materials, so when you apply for additional scholarships, you can rework information you have already developed, rather than starting again from scratch.

Writing the Perfect Essay

- Give yourself plenty of time to write and rewrite essays.
- Your essay must be original, and must fit the requested format. Reusing essays without reworking them to fit the specific scholarship is not effective.
- If the scholarship requires answering essay questions, be sure your writing answers the question. If the question has more than one part, be sure to address the various components of the question.
- Choose a topic that is meaningful to you so you can put your heart into your writing.
- Brainstorm. Think about content and organize what you feel is important and will best describe you and your goals.
 - What are your major accomplishments?
 - What attributes, qualities or skills distinguish you from everyone else?
 - Consider your favorite books, movies, works of art, people you admire and how they have influenced you.
 - Have you ever fought hard for something and succeeded?
 - What are your future aspirations, dreams, and goals? How do you want to be remembered, or what do you want to be known for?
 - What have you done outside the classroom that shows more of who you are as an individual? What are your most important extracurricular and community activities?
- If a scholarship asks for educational goals, and you are not sure what you want to do, either; a) pick one likely scenario and explain it, or b) explain everything you do know such as; how much education you want, the type of work and work setting you wish to prepare for, the driving force that would make any line of work meaningful to you, some areas of interest you are currently considering.

- Do not use an essay just to repeat information already in the application.
- Emphasize the things that are unique about you.
- Your objective is to convince someone else that they should invest their scholarship in you. Be sure to choose a topic that will give you the opportunity to be convincing.
- Know your audience and speak to their interests. For example, if you are applying for a business scholarship, speak in your essay about your personal interests and experiences in business-related areas.
- Do not be overly humble in your application. The selection committee is not likely to know you, or to realize you just don't like to brag. You can be clear about your accomplishments without sounding like the biggest ego in the universe.
- Your essay needs to be engaging and memorable. Start out strong.
- Humor on paper is tricky; save it for your friends.
- Be yourself and be creative. Do not adopt a negative or preachy tone.
- If you choose to write about a traumatic experience, write about how it caused you to grow, rather than focusing on the negative outcomes of the event.
- Leave these phrases out of your application: "I didn't do much in high school", "Next year I plan to do some volunteer work...", "I just can't tell you how meaningful that was for me."
- If the essay has a page or word number limit, do not go over the limit. Scholarship committees need to be able to compare parallel essays. If yours is longer, it gives you an unfair advantage. Some committees may solve this by removing your application from consideration.
- Be sure to have a respected critic read over your essays.
- Check and double-check the grammar and spelling. Don't just depend on the spell-checker; have someone critically proof read for you. The experience may be painful at first, but the pay off is more important. Be especially certain you spell the name of the scholarship correctly.