

Strategies for Presenting Yourself Well on Scholarship Applications from the National Scholarship Providers Association

- Each scholarship fund has its own specific guidelines. Before applying, be certain that you meet, or will meet, all the necessary qualifications such as academic standing, specified financial situation, and personal or professional background and explain how you meet them.
- Remember, due to limited funding, not all applicants receive scholarships. The process is competitive, and you should be careful and thorough when filling out your application to give yourself the best possible advantage.
- If you were not selected in the past years, re-evaluate your qualifications and application package. Be certain that you make academic progress, make any necessary adjustments in your application process, then reapply next year.
- Do not assume that because you have received a scholarship previously, that you will automatically receive another award. You must present a high quality package every time you apply for a scholarship. Be careful of deadlines.
- Talk to scholarship recipients to get their advice on the application process.

General Application Tips:

- Have multiple copies of paper applications in case you make a mistake and must start over.
- Save copies of all on-line applications in a scholarship folder on your computer.
- Make a checklist of what you need to have for the application before you start filling it out.
- Make a copy of your entire application so that, if your submission is lost, you can quickly send another copy.
- Put your name on all of the materials: every page of the essay, recommendations, photos, etc. in case part of your application is misplaced by the scholarship committee.
- Be consistent with the names you use: Use the same first name, not nicknames, and be consistent with your last name if it is hyphenated.
- If the application asks for a GPA, class rank, or other specific information, fill in the information, do not write “see transcript” or “see resume.”
- If you want to be taken seriously, consider setting up a separate email account for college and scholarship applications and inquiries. Be sure to check it regularly. Do not use a cutesy or suggestive email address—this will affect how seriously your application is viewed.
- If a required attachment will be sent from another source, such as a high school, college, recommender, or financial aid office, it is up to you to make sure the information has been sent.
- No substitutions! If an item is requested, particularly for a need-based program, provide it. If you don't understand the request, ask. In competitive programs, the missing or substituted item could tank an otherwise strong application.
- Read your application packet and ask yourself, “Would I give an award to this person if all that I knew about them is the information presented in these documents?”
- Don't let a parent fill out the application.
- Your application package represents the entire and only picture of you the selection committees have. Always type (or neatly print using black ink) your application. Your application must appear neat and professional.
- Proofread your application. Pay particular attention to any spaces you have left blank. If the answer is zero, write in 0 rather than leaving a blank space. Blank spaces may cause your application to be rejected.
- Have at least one other person review your whole application package, including your personal statement or essay. Find the most qualified person to proofread for you.

- Show you have worked—either with substantial responsibilities in the home or in summer/school year jobs. Work/employment responsibilities build character as much as many other activities.
- Provide evidence that you have made something good happen. That’s leadership. If you have made a difference—in whatever way—share it.
- Start early! Leave plenty of time to triple-check to make sure all directions have been followed and that you are turning in the best application possible. Scrambling leads to mistakes. Use a calendar to keep yourself on top of things. Early applications are often greatly appreciated.
- If a photo is requested, use a suitable color head shot. Be appropriate.
- Be sure to follow guidelines. For example, if the application asks for a self-addressed stamped postcard to receive confirmation, don’t include an envelope instead.
- Always send a thank you note to the donor. If appropriate, continue to keep the donor informed of your progress throughout the year.
- Show evidence that you believe in something apart from the certainty you hope to make a million dollars. What are you doing, or what do you hope to do, that will make the world a slightly better place?
- Never think that any accomplishment or activity is too insignificant to be mentioned. If you’re proud of it, passionate about it, or think there is something even slightly interesting or unique about it, include it! Now is not the time to sell yourself short!
- Spell out abbreviations that may not be generally recognized.

Personal Statement/Essay Tips:

- Your personal statement/essay is viewed as the equivalent of a face-to-face interview.
- Make connections between areas of study, career goals, interests, and personal philosophies.
- You should be certain that all requested topics are covered in your personal statement/essay. Use specific examples whenever possible.
- Part of your proofreading should include attention to the tone of what you have written. Do you sound like a student that the donor’s organization would be proud to sponsor?
- Remember to be yourself. Do not try to give a response that you think will be liked by the selection committee. All selection committees are looking to decipher your own, unique personality, not one crafted to fit what you think the judges are looking for. An honest reply will usually get you far.
- Don’t just describe what you have accomplished, but also share how you felt when making those achievements.
- If you have a story that reflects overcoming obstacles, tell it. If not, express your appreciation for the benefits of a solid home life; it’s still the best gift parents can give.
- For scholarships that have a financial need component, tell your story if there is something that is out of the ordinary. Explain any one-time financial events or unusual circumstances, rather than making the scholarship committee guess about your finances.
- Save your essays on the computer or a disk. You may be able to slightly edit or expand on their ideas for different scholarships.
- Make the most of essay questions. For example, if asked, “Of all the activities you are involved in, which one means the most to you?” keep in mind that this does not necessarily have to be the activity you spend the most time doing, but one that impacts the lives of others and shows more about your personality and values.
- Don’t worry about bragging. You’re hoping to impress the scholarship committee with your accomplishments. But do pay attention to how often you say “I.”

Recommendation Letter Tips:

- Ask the recommender to fill out the scholarship's form if one is provided.
- Good examples of people to ask for references include past or present teachers/professors, past or present employers, religious leaders, community leaders, and organization leaders. Generally, family and friends do not make the best references. The person you ask should know you personally and be able to attest to specific qualifications outlined in the scholarship requirements, i.e., financial need, GPA, community service, leadership roles, etc. They should be able to write about your character, commitment, experiences and successes.
- Provide the recommender with a resume or list of your activities and accomplishments.
- Always give the recommender adequate time to prepare your letter or form.

Transcript/Academic Record Tips:

- If you have an off-semester or even a course grade that is an aberration, explain it. Leaving it out there for the evaluator to guess is not in your best interest.
- Make sure your transcript is properly sealed, with school stamp/signature across the seal.
- If your school's grading system is not based on a standard scale, include a description of how your school determines grades.

Scholarship Search Tips:

- There are many scholarship opportunities available, so never limit yourself to applying for just one. Research as many funding sources as you can, learn which ones you may qualify for, make a calendar of due dates, then get to work.
- Find at least two search engines with which you're comfortable—use both to search for scholarship opportunities. Two good examples include www.fastweb.com and www.scholarships.com. Remember to check the schools that you are applying to. Many schools offer scholarships to students that seek them.
- Use your parent/family member business connections! Many companies offer scholarships solely to the children/relatives of employees.
- Use a scholarship-only email account. This will keep all of your scholarship information in one place.
- Organize the information in a way that makes sense to you. For example, when using Fastweb, click on the "deadline" heading to sort the scholarships according to deadline.
- Look where you're going! If you are headed for a specific field, look at large companies in that field or industry, check their websites for scholarship opportunities. For example, a pre-nursing or pre-med student should check out websites for drug manufacturers or companies that do medical research. Most companies' websites are searchable. Try searching "scholarships." If that doesn't yield results, try "foundation" or "philanthropy."
- Look at local organizations such as churches and recreational centers or Y's for scholarships. Your high school guidance office and your public library probably have files about scholarship opportunities.