



How to Bullet-Proof Your Scholarship Essay

Produce quality essays that scholarship judges will remember.

(Information gathered from financialaid.com and finaid.org)

The scholarship essay is your best opportunity to impress the scholarship judges and let them know who you really are. Through the essay, you can show your passions, values or accomplishments that just aren't given justice in the fill-in-the-blanks of the application. While an uninspired essay won't necessarily doom your chances of getting a scholarship, an inspired one can propel you into the acceptance pile. Here's how to produce a quality essay that will be remembered:

- Read the directions
- Follow your passions
- Write an outline
- Have a point
- Use alternate note-taking techniques, if necessary
- Begin your essay with fireworks
- Support your statements with concrete examples
- Let the scholarship judges into your mind
- End with a bang
- Don't exaggerate
- Proofread and get help

Read the directions. Read and follow the essay directions. Sometimes the directions can clarify the intent of the essay questions. If you don't follow the directions, you will give the scholarship judges a negative impression, telling them that you can't or won't follow instructions.

Follow your passions. Choose the topic that is the most compelling to you. Chances are, if you are passionate about a topic, you'll be able to write a more interesting essay about the topic. Don't write about what you think the judges want you to write about. Be honest in your answers about what you really think. If you do this, the words will come more easily and your excitement will show through in your writing. A truly interesting essay will engage the reader and attract attention.

Write an outline. Writing an outline can help provide focus and structure to the essay. It will minimize the tendency to jump from point to point and rambling without connecting one thought to another. Using an outline will allow you to present your arguments and ideas in a manner that supports your conclusions, yielding a more powerful essay.

Have a point. Before you start your essay outline, think about what you are trying to convey in your essay. You should be able to summarize the point of your essay in a single sentence. If you can't, you may not have a point. It's important to have an underlying message that you're trying to relate through your essay. Try to find a unifying theme that binds together the threads of your background into a tapestry that shows not only where you have been and where you are now, but where you will go in the future. This will provide a sense of direction and cohesiveness.

Use alternate note-taking techniques, if necessary. If you find it difficult to write essays, try talking about the essay topic while recording the conversation. Since the act of writing often interferes with the flow of ideas, speaking into a tape recorder can help you capture your ideas and emotions better and faster than staring at a blank computer screen. After you're done,

transcribe the recording and edit it into essay form. This will give you a good start on your essay.

Begin your essay with fireworks. Don't begin with the obvious—your name, when you were born or what high school you go to. Instead, try dialogue, a description of a scene or a bold statement. Test some creative approaches to capturing the scholarship judges' attention right from the start.

Support your statements with concrete examples. One mistake that many students make is that they are too general. Making a broad statement without supporting it with examples is not very effective. For example, if you say that one of your best qualities is leadership, give an example where you demonstrated leadership. If your application is filled with vague and abstract answers, the scholarship judges don't have any way of evaluating your qualifications.

Let the scholarship judges into your mind. Instead of just describing an event, let the judges experience the event with you. Share the thoughts that are running through your mind during the event. Explain what you are thinking and why you made the decisions that you did. This will give them real insight into who you are.

End with a bang. You want to sandwich your essay between a strong beginning and conclusion. The conclusion is the last taste that you will leave in the mouths of scholarship judges. Summarize your point and wrap your thoughts together with a conclusion that they'll remember.

Don't exaggerate. Stretching the truth can hurt your application. Scholarship committees are good at detecting when a student exaggerates in an essay and the dishonesty may cause you to lose a scholarship you might otherwise have won.

Proofread and get help. Check your essay for correct spelling and grammar usage. Get feedback from at least one person about your writing. While your essay of course must be your own work, you can improve your writing with input from other people. Ask for feedback and don't be afraid of a little constructive criticism. However, don't edit the life out of your essay and don't let fellow editors re-write your thoughts. Use their feedback to your advantage.