

# Steps for Writing Scholarship Essays



## 1. Read the Essay Prompt Carefully

Read the question or prompt thoroughly and try to "read between the lines." See **tip #1** on the reverse side of this handout for more details.

## 2. Brainstorm Key Points to Include

Scholarship committees are often looking for a person that fits their organizational goals. **Research the organization** and try to find their **mission statement** on their website. Circle a few key words from the mission statement to include in your essay.

You might want to include:

- Why your experience and the mission of the funding organization are a good fit
- Academic awards & other honors
- Internships or other academic experiences that might not be on your transcript
- How your major/concentration aligns with your future career goals
- Challenges you've overcome
- Your financial circumstances that make it necessary for you to finance your studies through scholarship money

**Integrate these points into an essay that answers the prompt.**

## 3. Write an Outline or a Rough Draft

Sometimes telling a story is the most effective way to write a scholarship essay. For example, you can tell the story of why you chose your major/concentration, or about a moment that inspired you.

Start your outline with **main points** that describe the basic storyline and then **fill in the details**.

OUTLINE

1<sup>st</sup> Main Point: In \_\_\_\_\_ class, the instructor noticed my enthusiasm and recommended outside reading.

Details: Opened my eyes to \_\_\_\_\_ and inspired me to \_\_\_\_\_.

2<sup>nd</sup> Main Point: I started volunteering at \_\_\_\_\_.

Details: In the course of volunteering I realized \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

3<sup>rd</sup> Main Point: \_\_\_\_\_ inspired me to pursue a career in social justice.

Details: I see myself doing \_\_\_\_\_ in my community. I plan on using \_\_\_\_\_ which I studied in \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

## 4. Include a Clear Sentence that Summarizes Your Main Points

Consider putting this sentence near the beginning of your essay to preview your main points. If you wanted to focus on your **volunteer experience** & the **organization's goals** you might write something like:

**"My personal experiences promoting permaculture at local elementary schools with the Foodbank's Backyard Bounty program demonstrates my commitment to educating our youth and aligns with your organization's mission: shaping community leaders who are working towards a more just and sustainable world."**

You might want to check out AUSB Writing Center's resource on Thesis Statements and Guiding Ideas.

## 5. Rewrite, Revise, and visit AUSB's Writing Center

Strong essays take time to write. You should set aside some time for revision. After finishing a first draft, take a day or two away from the essay and then come back to it with fresh eyes, or bring it to the Writing Center.

Ask yourself:

- Does your essay sound like it's written in your voice?
- Does it answer the prompt?
- Is your essay interesting and detailed?
- Is it free from spelling or grammar errors?

Adapted from: "Eight Steps Towards a Better Scholarship Essay." *internationalstudent.com*.

# 4 Tips for Scholarship Essays



## Tip #1: Consider the Scholarship Committee's Expectations

Think about what the scholarship committee expects you to write. The committee likely expects you to write about how your plans align with their organization's goals. However, in many cases the essay question won't directly ask you to mention **how you plan on contributing to your community or to your field**. For example, an organization might ask a broad question such as "Why are you interested in studying ecology?" But they will really also want you to write about your future plans.

Research the organization's goals/philosophy. Find areas of similarity between the organization's philosophy and your own. Mention these areas and how your future career goals or community service will promote the organization's mission.

## Tip #2: Be Specific and Avoid Generic Statements

For example, if you are writing about how your father is your role model, try to avoid clichés and generalizations. Consider mentioning something that might be surprising to your reader and connecting that to your main idea.

Tanabe and Tanabe (2014) give the following advice:

"Place your thumb over your name at the top of the essay, and ask yourself if any of your classmates could have written this essay. If the answer is 'yes' then it fails the thumb test and is probably not original."

## Tip #3: Narrate a Significant Moment

One of the most effective techniques for writing a scholarship essay is to include a narration of an important moment in your life. In other words, don't try to explain everything about your personal history. Instead focus on just **one specific moment, event, or realization**.

Here are some example questions you could answer:

### Questions about your **major/concentration/career goals**:

- Was there a specific event/moment that helped you choose your major/career path?
- Is there a specific idea/reading/concept you studied that changed your way of thinking?
- How does your major/career goal suit your personality? Is there a moment you could reference to highlight this?

### Questions about relevant **volunteer/work or personal experience**:

- What is the most important thing you learned from your work/volunteerism?
- Was there a specific moment in the past when you had a personal realization that shaped your life?
- What motivated you to volunteer? How do you personally benefit from volunteering?
- Is there a person that you've met that has inspired you? How?
- What accomplishment are you most proud of? Why?

## Tip #4: Express Your Passion

If you choose a topic that you really care about, it will be much easier to write a compelling scholarship essay.

Adapted from Tanabe, G., & Tanabe, K. (2014). *How to write a winning scholarship essay: 30 essays that won over \$3 million in scholarships*. Belmont, CA: SuperCollege, LLC.