Scholarship Essay – The Basics

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Scholarship Essays –

A scholarship essay is a document used by universities or scholarship foundations/donors to assess the qualifications of applicants.

Although these essays will vary in their requirements, they are looking for evidence of some or all of the following:

• Research/Scholarship
• Accomplishments/Academic Merit
• Commitment to / Love of the Profession
• Leadership
• Financial Need

Read the prompt fully and completely so that you know which aspects of yourself to focus on!

What are the readers looking for?

• Always remember this is a persuasive piece of writing
• Like an interview on paper
• It’s still an essay, so write it like one
  • Drafting
  • Rhetorical Strategy (Purpose, audience awareness, etc.)
• Most of all, it is an opportunity for you to distinguish yourself from other applicants

Scholarship Essay – Genre & Purpose
Let the prompt narrow your scope
Make sure you answer their question(s) with a thesis
Look for ways to frame your qualifications within the parameters of the essay
Do NOT include info that wasn’t asked for
Stick to word or page count

The essay is a story – you are the subject
Remember that no matter what the prompt says, this essay is a way to get to know you. So make sure you are talking about yourself
Use active voice: you are the “acting” subject
Story means vivid imagery – help your reader SEE you
Contextualize every item you include
You are selling yourself as it relates to the prompt
Writing is like sewing
Don’t drop the connecting thread

Be concrete and specific
Your reader wasn’t there, so what do they need to know in order to understand?
Show, don’t tell
Anyone can claim they will be a great teacher, but those with examples will be believed
Remember your controlling idea? It needs evidence
You have a thesis – now show your readers that it’s true

When scholarships are for your field, you can assume the other applicants have a lot in common with you –
So what makes you stand out?

- Personality counts
- Structure can set your essay apart
- Discuss unique traits you bring to the table
- Remember: passion goes a lot way
Keys to Success, Item 5:

AND be what they are looking for:

- Who is giving the scholarship?
  - Look for a mission statement – reflect the right values
  - What is their purpose for awarding the scholarship? Make sure you highlight that you will fulfill it. Make them proud to choose you!

Important To Do's

- Read the instructions or writing task carefully.
- Approach this statement as an academic assignment (but don’t exactly write it like one)
- Be specific and thorough when explaining past experiences or accomplishments. Elaborate on anything that might confuse an outside reader.
- Positivity and Energy are critical, caring is contagious!

And some don’ts

- Don’t focus on the negative.
- Don’t repeat information that appears elsewhere.
- Don’t lie or exaggerate.
- Don’t be too casual or vague.
- Don’t use inappropriate tone or language.

Quick tips

- Read the instructions slowly and carefully to ensure you understand.
- Brainstorm, Organize, and outline before you write.
- Make sure your outline touches on every aspect required per the instructions.
- Re-read the prompt AFTER the outline is complete.
- Write your essay by elaborating on each of the points in your outline. Evidence is key.
- Don’t list your accomplishments, show how they developed you.
Tips, cont.

• Use clear, concise language throughout the essay.
• Make sure your grammar and spelling are impeccable.
• Read the question again and then read your essay to be certain that the essay addresses every point.
• Have someone with strong writing and editing skills proofread the essay before you submit it. Also read your essay out loud.
• Have your letter writers/mentors/LRC tutor/trusted friend read your essay! (Really, all of them)

Final points: Style

• Every word counts. There is no space for filler.
• Be active in your story, and in your sentences.
• Don’t overgeneralize specificity is key.
• Avoid clichés.
• Clarity over cuteness a difficult to follow essay will not be chosen.
• Do not be afraid to let your voice shine through.
  (but don’t be arrogant, glib, flippant, etc. – remember, you love this field and you want this scholarship!)

Successful and Unsuccessful Samples

• The following two essays demonstrate an:
  • Unsuccessful essay full of grammatical and structural errors, redundancy, clichés, vagueness, and poor word choice.
  • Successful essay which includes a level of sophistication in tone, language, and sentence structure, as well as specificity. It also resonates with a sincere passion and compassion toward the chosen field, which affords the audience/reader a glimpse of the author’s character.

ESSAY: Personal essay (one-page double spaced) stating why you have chosen to pursue a career in education, your professional goals and why you feel you are deserving of this scholarship.

I became interested in being a teacher after I finished the Americorps program City Year. In this program, I was a youth mentor and tutor for inner city kids. In this program I assisted the teacher and evaluated kids on their grades and created education activities that made students who attended to learn basic skills like reading and math. This program was really stressful but also inspired me because my students went from below grade level to proficient over just one summer. This program made me hungry to help more students so I decided to become a teacher.

My professional goals in education are to create a day with activities where students can learn about careers after they are done with high school. Even though I am studying to be an elementary teacher I think it is important for kids to know as early as possible what lies beyond to help them stay focused in school and achieve all their dreams. I’d prepare for this day by working with a committee of other teachers to help me plan the activities and have students write reports on the careers they are interested in so they can present them.

I am deserving of the Lillian Raphael scholarship because I have a passion for creating students who are leaders and push for a better world. This would happen by having projects and activities geared towards real life applications such as learning to write a check or balance a budget. Second, I work two jobs where I use the skills I learn from my education classes and apply them in the real world. I feel that all students should have a well-rounded and practical education that will make them outstanding citizens in society.
As Ron Edmonds states, “We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us.” I have had the privilege of spending sixty hours of student teaching in a special education classroom where most of the children are eligible for free-lunch and are English Language Learners. Many teachers may look at children’s struggles – poverty, language acquisition, home instability, and special education as obstacles that are nearly impossible to overcome, and thus have low expectations for children’s academic success. But I am not like other teachers. I am not discouraged by student’s challenges; in fact it ignites a fire in me to work even harder!

Teaching has been my passion and career choice for as long as I can remember. I chose to teach special education because I believe that all children have strengths and potential to succeed ... and is to sign me as their teacher to foster respect, relationship, and success in academics. My studies in the Mild/Moderate Special Education Program at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) stimulated me, excite me, and inspire me to strive for excellence in my teaching ... and children’s learning. As I near completion of my teaching credential, I feel my life’s purpose is coming to fruition.

I am eagerly looking forward to the final step of my academic journey – student teaching. I was thrilled to be able to continue my education as a special education teacher. I feel my knowledge and skills in the children I will be teaching. This generous support from the Dan and Cindy Chernow Scholarship will provide me with the financial assistance needed to devote myself to full-time student teaching. I would greatly appreciate the consideration of my application.