Who to ask?

As a rule of thumb, you should always get a recommendation from at least one professor from whom you’ve taken a class. Other people who make good recommenders are a professor with whom you did research, a Teaching Assistant in a course you took, your boss from your place of work, your academic counselor, or a person in a position of leadership with an organization you’re affiliated with. A recommender should be a person of authority who knows you well enough to attest to your merits and potential. A recommender needs to be able to write about your personal qualities. Family members and friends are not appropriate people to ask for recommendations.

Tip: If you don’t have someone to ask, then it’s important to start working on these types of relationships. At some point you'll need to speak to someone. It may be difficult at a big university, make an effort to develop relationships with professors you like.

How to ask?

Since you are asking your recommender for a favor, it's important that you are gracious and organized. Request a one-on-one meeting with the individual. You should meet with your recommender to ask for the recommendation at least three weeks in advance of the deadline. A month's notice is preferable. Come to the meeting prepared. Bring your recommender information about the scholarship. This includes the organization's name, contact information, their mission, and the scholarship criteria. If there are specific forms or criteria for the letter of recommendation, then bring that information for as well. A copy of your resume and any work you did for their class is helpful. Supply your recommender with an addressed, stamped envelope for their letter. Kindly explain what you are applying for, why you feel you are qualified and why you are requesting the recommendation from him/her.

Follow-up and send a thank you note

Ultimately it's your responsibility to ensure that your letters of recommendation arrive on time. Follow-up with your recommender one week prior to the due date and give them a gentle reminder of the ensuing deadline. It's important to thank your recommender for their time. Send an old-fashioned, hand written thank you note to your recommender. Send it immediately after the deadline. When the time comes, let them know the results of your scholarship application as well.

Be Professional

Treat a scholarship interview as you would a professional job interview. Wear professional attire. Men should wear suits or slacks with a tucked-in shirt and a tie. Women should wear suits or business attire. No jeans, sneakers, ripped or messy clothing. Use your best manners. Introduce yourself and shake hands with the interviewers. Make eye contact and maintain good posture.

Do Your Research

Take the time to do some research on the organization granting the scholarship. Understand their mission and the kind of work they do. Think about what they value. Review the scholarship eligibility requirements. What are they looking for? How do you meet the requirements? Put yourself in the interviewers' shoes and think about what they might be looking for.

Come Prepared

Come prepared to talk about yourself and why you are qualified for their scholarship. Re-read the application you submitted. Come prepared to talk about anything and everything you wrote. Often times interviewers will follow-up on something you mentioned in your essay. Come prepared with some questions to ask the interviewers as well.

Be Yourself

Don’t forget to let your personality show through. Relax, calm your nerves. The interviewers want to get to know you and to hear your story. Avoid giving one-word answers. Give examples and anecdotes from your life experiences.

Typical Interview Questions

1. Why are you pursuing this major?
2. What are your career aspirations and how do you plan to achieve them?
3. How do you contribute to the campus and/or the community?