

UC IRVINE SCHOLARSHIPS

Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships

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tips for writing winning SCHOLARSHIP ESSAYS

Essay writing assistance is available at the Scholarships Resource Center in the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships.

*Get help brainstorming
See examples of winning essays*

*Bring in your rough draft and get feedback
Browse through our essay writing books*

1 Know Your Audience

Do your research on the organization offering the scholarship. What is their mission? What is the purpose of the scholarship? A professional organization may seek to help students pursue careers in their field. A foundation may offer a scholarship in memory of a person who was passionate about a cause. Your essay should highlight how you represent the values and mission of the scholarship. Context matters.

Example: A foundation is offering a scholarship to students studying to become teachers in low-performing schools. You should discuss why you want to work in such an environment, the relevant experiences you've had and how you plan to achieve this career goal.

2 Create a Thesis

Similar to how you create a thesis for your academic essays, your scholarship essays should have a thesis too. What is the objective of your essay? You should be able to express the point of your essay in one sentence. Your whole essay should revolve around your thesis.

Example: Having witnessed the inequities between high-performing and low-performing schools, I have decided to pursue a career in teaching and serving our most at-need students.

3 Brag a Little

Scholarships are awarded based on merit, so it's important that you highlight your accomplishments. Keep in mind tip #2 though; only include achievements that relate to your thesis. Don't include items that have no relation to the scholarship, like writing about being a star soccer player when the organization is looking for students who volunteer in their community. Choose your applicable accomplishments and contextualize them. While it's important to boast, never lie or embellish.

Example: I was honored to be selected as volunteer of the year by the students at xyz school where I have been a reading tutor for the past year, volunteering 10 hours a week.

4 Stand Out

Write an essay that a judge will remember. You want to stand out from the rest of the crowd. If you're applying for a scholarship for future teachers, you can assume all your competitors want to be teachers too, so the question is: what makes you the best teacher for this scholarship? Describe what is unique about you. Another way to make your essay stand out is to be creative with your essay structure. You could lead in with a catchy story. Share a piece of yourself. The reader should be able to get a real sense of your personality from your essay without ever meeting you.

5 Every Word Counts

Choose your words wisely. Everything you include in your essay should serve a purpose. You want to present a clear and concise thesis backed up by specific examples. Avoid general statements; show, don't tell. Grammar and spelling always count. A poorly written essay is hard to follow and judges will not look favorably upon sloppy work. Proofread and then proofread again! Have someone else look at it too.

A Word of Caution

A common mistake is to write a "woe is me" essay. Scholarship judges do not want to read a sob story or an essay about how much you need financial support. Scholarships are based on your merits. Judges want to hear what you've accomplished despite your challenges. They want to hear about your potential and the great things you will accomplish with their scholarship support. A scholarship essay should always be uplifting.

Other Tips

- Adhere to word limits.
- Always type your essay.
- When you're done writing, re-read the prompt. Have you answered the question?
- Have someone proofread your essay and give you feedback.
- Never plagiarize someone else's work.
- Once you have a good personal statement you can recycle it for other scholarship applications.