

Tips for Writing Scholarship Essays

1. Make sure you understand the prompt or question clearly.

The surest way NOT to win any money is to fail to answer the question or respond to the prompt appropriately. Make sure you know what the scholarship is asking for.

2. Familiarize yourself with any specific guidelines.

This may include word count, form, and document type. The Hutt scholarship offered by Lake Michigan Credit Union, for example, specifies that essays need to be between 750 and 1000 words, typed and double-spaced, with a specific header of just your 3 initials. Your essay may not even be read if it doesn't follow the guidelines specified.

If you can, check out previous winners' scholarships to see what they wrote. It will give you an idea of what the judges are looking for.

Use a readable font, such as Times New Roman or Arial.

3. Assess whether outside research is appropriate or necessary.

Some prompts or questions are very personal and require no outside sources, and other scholarship guidelines will use the phrase *research essay*. Sometimes, however, it isn't quite so obvious whether research is required. The NRA Civil Rights Defense Fund does not specify whether research is required (the scholarship site states "The theme for the essay is 'The Second Amendment to the Constitution: Why it is important to our nation'"); however, the website offers a contact name and phone number for "a list of scholarly references to aid in research," and states that the essay will be judged on "scholarship (including works cited)," among other things. You might be able to complete an essay on this topic without research, but it probably won't be very competitive.

4. Use the writing process: brainstorm, plan, draft/write, edit, repeat.

Writing is a nonlinear process, and you should plan on revising your work. I recommend drafting some sort of outline for longer essays, and having someone proof-read your work before you submit it. Make sure the person reading your work knows the guidelines for the essay—it's difficult to be helpful when the prompt or instructions are a mystery.

5. Write Well.

No one is going to give you money if you don't know when to use "too" or "it's." Make sure your essay is free of spelling errors, run-ons and fragments, and punctuation errors. Make sure it's well organized—each paragraph should have a specific purpose or topic, and your thesis/purpose should be clear. Don't be repetitive, don't answer your own rhetorical questions, and don't be wordy if you don't have to.

6. Be original.

Many scholarships only require a short response to the prompt "Tell us why you deserve this scholarship." Common responses involve student claims that they will work hard and use the money well, and these responses are sure to bore the scholarship committee to tears. These types of writing responses may simply be a formality, and the scholarship might be awarded based on financial need or standardized test scores, but use the opportunity to show the committee how you are different from all of the other students answering this question.

7. Learn from past scholarship winners.

Review past winning application, essays, and other materials. Many times, you can request sample winning entries from the organization administering the scholarship program.

8. Don't Plagiarize!

This one's obvious. No one's going to pay you for stealing.

Example Essay Scholarships:

Zinch Weekly 3-Sentence Essay Scholarship

<http://www.zinch.com/Scholarships/Weekly--Three-Sentence-Essay--Scholarship>

NRA Scholarship (2nd Amendment)

<http://www.nradefensefund.org/writingcontest.aspx>

The Fountainhead Essay Contest

<http://essaycontest.aynrandnovels.com/TheFountainhead.aspx?theme=blue>

Resources:

www.fastweb.com

www.careercruising.com

www.scholarships.com

www.supercollege.com

www.schoolsoup.com

<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/> (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)

http://www.scholarshiphelp.org/scholarship_essay.htm

<http://www.grfoundation.org/scholarships>

<http://www.michigancolleges.org/ScholarshipPrograms.htm>

<http://admissions.msu.edu/finances/scholarships.asp>

GRCC Foundation Scholarships

<http://www.gvsu.edu/scholarships/>

Use the Student Services link on the CAPS home page to see the scholarships for which they have information.

250 Words:

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