

Writing the Scholarship Essay

The scholarship essay is a variation on the Five Paragraph Essay that you probably saw for the first time in fifth grade. It has a basic structure with a little bit of a difference: you need to write with the application specifications in mind.

Some things to consider:

Tell your story. But remember to tell that story *in the context of the application*. For example, if the scholarship is for “leaders,” highlight experiences in which you’ve shown leadership qualities, like ability to work with groups and motivate people toward a common goal; good judgment and organization; putting principles and the greater good above one’s self. You may have done this in your volunteer activities, in your dorm, or in your personal life. Give examples. Be honest.

Remember your audience. The committee members reading this essay are looking for candidates who best meet the spirit of the donors’ intent. That’s why it’s important to read the application carefully, and *write to the application*. You might also research the donor. His or her background may give you some insights into their motivation for funding the scholarship, and you may be able to speak to that in your essay.

Be authentic. Try to write it like you’d say it. Be respectful, but not overly formal. Be yourself, but not overly casual. Strike the right tone. Read this essay out loud several times to some different people—including older people, and get feedback.

Do several revisions. Let the essay sit for 48 hours and come back to it and revise.

The Basic Outline

First Paragraph: Introduce yourself and tell in brief, why you feel qualified for the scholarship. Mention hometown and major.

Second paragraph: Begin to tell your story in the context of the scholarship. How do your qualities fit the application requirements? Be specific.

Third paragraph: A little deeper background. How have you gotten to this point? Have you overcome any obstacles, physical, financial, personal? Don’t go too deeply into a hard luck story, but if you have succeeded against some kind of tough odds, you should mention this. This is also the place to put anything unusual or interesting in your background that might stand out. Here you might also talk about your long-term plans and why, as well as how you came to those goals.

Fourth paragraph: How would this scholarship affect your studies? What would it help you do and how would it help you reach your goals?

Fifth paragraph: Summarize and reiterate your qualifications and make the committee comfortable with giving you the scholarship. Remember that it makes the committee members look good when they pick a winning candidate who reflects well on the donor and UMass!

SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY EXAMPLES

Essay Example #1

Please write a 250-500 word essay describing any obstacles you have overcome and what you did to overcome them.

I was in a car accident when I was eight. My family's car was hit by a drunk driver, and I became paralyzed from my waist down. I had to get a wheelchair from then on and kids at school made fun of me for not being able to walk anymore. My family helped me to make sure I could go to the doctor and to all my physical therapy appointments. These appointments were expensive and cost a lot of money. But even though I had a wheelchair, I still worked hard in school and was involved in activities like Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD). I hope to become a lawyer when I am older and help other people.

Analysis: Questions to Ask:

- Did the essay answer the questions?
- Does the essay provide personal examples and vivid detail?
- Does the essay paint a picture of the student?
- Does the student stand out from other applicants?
- Does the essay grab and hold your attention?

Essay Example #2

Please write a 250-500 word essay describing any obstacles you have overcome and what you did to overcome them.

On a late summer evening in 1999, a drunk driver struck my family's car as we were returning home from a weekend trip to Canada. The sudden impact of my crumpling passenger door crushed my legs and left me paralyzed from my waist down. I was only eight years old. After four weeks in the hospital and two surgeries, I returned home unable to move without the assistance of a wheelchair. The active and athletic life I had lived evaporated in those few seconds, and from then on, I had to face the rest of my life sitting in a wheelchair. Needless to say, I was devastated. Kids at school made fun of me for not being able to walk anymore and needing to use a "granny" chair. Despite the constant teasing, I remained positive because my family supported me unconditionally. Although my parents made barely enough money to support me and my two brothers, they took me to all my doctor and physical therapy appointments scraping to save every penny to pay all my medical bills. Seeing my family's sacrifice, I was determined to succeed in school and provide a future for my family. In high school, I helped start a club called Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD) to help educate teens about the dangers of drunk driving. By telling my personal story, I could share first-hand the destructive nature of driving under the influence of alcohol. These experiences in serving my community have inspired me to want to become a lawyer so I can continue keeping my community safe and providing a voice for those who need it.

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