

Scholarship Essay

The helpful hints here are organized around the Four Broad Steps of the Writing Process which is as follows:

- **Prewriting**—everything you do to prepare to write
- **Drafting**—writing “what you think” and “why you think that” in detail with examples
- **Revision**—improving content, structure, and continuity (logical progression of ideas)
- **Proofreading & Publishing**—eliminating bothersome mechanical errors

What is Your Purpose?

With any writing project you undertake, it is important to determine your purpose. In the case of a scholarship essay, the purpose is to convince (persuade) the committee to select you as the recipient of the scholarship award—and to do so over many other qualified candidates.

Who is Your Audience?

You have to remember who your audience might be when crafting a scholarship essay. It is likely that the committee is made up of college administrators, faculty, graduate students, and/or student ambassadors. Typically, the committee is college administrators and faculty. Since this is a fairly “unknown” audience unlike the students in your history or English class, you need to consider them and what they would expect in your writing.

To do this, conduct an “audience analysis inventory.” By answering the questions below, you can get a better understanding of who your audience might be which will ensure that you utilize the appropriate vocabulary and tone in your essay:

- What do you know about the audience’s age, gender, and education?
- What does the audience already know about the essay/essay question(s)/prompt?
- What are the audience’s expectations in an essay?
- What information will interest the audience?
- What in my personal history *must* I explain to the audience?

The Application Question(s)/Prompt

A clearly written scholarship question or prompt will ask that you perform a task well. That task will be communicated in the main **verb**: for example, *explain*, *compare*, or *discuss*. Once you are certain you have identified the main verb, you can begin to write your essay with confidence.

Typical verbs you might find:

- **Explain:** make clear; tell “how” to do; tell the meaning of. *Explain how life hardships have impacted your character.*
- **Describe:** give an account of; tell about; give a word picture of. *Describe an experience in which you had to overcome an academic challenge.*
- **Discuss:** talk over; consider from various points of view; present the different sides of. *Discuss the difficulties facing college students today.*
- **Justify:** show good reasons for; give your evidence; present facts to support your position. *Justify why you are the best candidate for this scholarship.*

EX: *Describe* your most meaningful achievements and how they demonstrate your leadership ability, your contributions to public service, and your long-and-short-term goals as well as how your education has contributed to who you are today.

Prewriting

The prewriting process is about generating as many ideas as you can on the topic(s) suggested by the question or prompt. Try any of the following prewriting techniques to help you develop a collection of information that could later be shaped into a draft:

- **Reading**—a reading assignment which you might have to respond to, summarize, or react to in some way shows that you have read and understood the material. The assignment may be a springboard from which you may make mental leaps to topics of related, but special interest to you.
- **Discussion**—in either an informal or formal manner can produce not only topics for your essay, but also possible content.
- **Personal Reflection**—with a specific topic to aid in direction is a productive way to generate topics and possible content.
- **Brainstorming**—also helps focus personal reflection. It involves offering ideas freely, without fear of criticism, allowing one idea to suggest another and another. The trick to brainstorming effectively is to allow the mind the freedom to make connections between ideas, no matter how strange the connections may seem at the time.
- **List Making**—a possible result of brainstorming is generating lists that suggest composition topics and supporting ideas. Generating lists help you look critically at ideas and their relationships:
 - Lists of main ideas
 - Lists of supporting details
 - Lists of examples
 - Lists of arguments
 - Lists of reasons
- **Graphic Organizers**—are drawings or maps that show how ideas connect. Using them will help you generate ideas and begin to put your thoughts on paper.
 - Webs
 - Clusters
 - Trees
 - Bubbles
 - Maps
- **Daily Experiences**—sometimes stimulate you to write as a result of what you have seen (film, art exhibit, accident) or what you have done (visiting a city dump, watching a track meet, suffering from loneliness).

Prewriting: Topics

Some potential topics to focus your prewriting activities on include:

- What are your major accomplishments?
- What was the most difficult time in your life?
- Have you ever struggled mightily for something?
- What have you done outside the classroom that demonstrates qualities sought after?
- Have you experienced a moment of epiphany, as if your eyes were opened to something you were previously blind to?

- Have you ever failed at something you desperately wanted to succeed at?
- What are your dreams for the future?

Prewriting: The Thesis Statement

Writing the thesis statement often occurs after the prewriting preparation. You know your purpose and you understand your audience, so what will you say to achieve your purpose with this particular audience? Write a sentence that states your topic and what you think about it.

EX: The most significant hardship I've had to overcome on my journey to further my education was the heart attack my mother had last fall.

Remember, a thesis statement is **NOT**:

- A question (How will I use my college experience in the real world?)
- An opinion (I think that I am the best candidate for this scholarship.)
- A fact (Only 39% of all women who apply for this scholarship receive it.)
- A quote (According to Hillary Clinton, "women need to continue to strive for excellence in education.")
- A fragment (Although I am returning to college.)

Drafting

Drafting is about getting down on paper what you think about your topic and why you think, including supportive details and evidence. Organizing the material in a structure is also important at this point of the writing process. Generally, the organization should follow one of three plans:

- chronological order (as arranged in time)
- spatial order (as arranged in space)
- order of importance (as arranged by any measure of significance)

While writing your draft, ignore the following so you can focus on expressing yourself in a "free" and "easy" manner:

- Length
- Spelling
- Grammar
- Logic
- Transitions

Focus on getting onto paper, what is in your head.

Revision

During the revision process, re-read the application question(s)/prompt. This way, you can begin to revise the content, structure, and consistency of your argument with the required question/prompt in mind. As you review your draft keep the following questions in mind as a guide for making changes:

- Did you answer the application question(s)/prompt?
- Did you use specific examples?
- Have you selected the best examples that highlight who you are and/or your abilities?
- Are you "showing" the reader using elements of description opposed to "telling" the reader?
- Does your essay have a format: introduction, body, and conclusion?
- Does the reader get a sense of "you" from your writing?
- Have you corrected grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors?

Proofreading/Publishing

After revising your draft, you'll still need to proofread your draft in order to eliminate bothersome mechanical errors. It's often helpful to read your draft out loud or have another person read your draft. Additionally, you should also:

- Submit your revised draft to EMCC Writing Center for review
- Double check grammar, spelling, and punctuation
- Double check application question(s)/prompt, length, and anything else required in essay
- Save essay in a Word format such as Rich Text Format (RTF) that is easily opened