



## Scholarship/Bursary Tips! 2015-16



This is an exciting time! You're graduating! But it's also a time of anxiety and nervousness. You're already dealing with the pressures of your high school career and they are significant. The process of getting ready, getting into, and paying for a post-secondary education is a *very* big **extra** project in your already crowded life.

Scholarships are the ideal form of student aid, as they're basically gifts that never have to be repaid. Free money! On the other hand, student loans must be repaid, but they're made at very low interest rates, and you're usually not required to begin repayment until six months after you graduate. Basically, if you cannot get access to the free money you have to borrow it in the form of a student loan.

Think of the path to success in earning scholarships as having approximately three parts.

1. You must be able to organize and prioritize.
2. You must be able to write about a variety of topics that may or may not be exciting to you in a cohesive and thoughtful way.
3. You must understand yourself well enough to create a compelling portrait of who you are and you must understand your audience well enough to be able to position your skills and strengths as worthy of their support. Scholarship committees award funding to candidates they can understand and relate to, and who distinguish themselves from other candidates by their ability to communicate how deserving they are.

Should **you** apply for scholarships?

**Yes! Yes! Yes!** Why? Beyond the obvious fact that every extra dollar can help you and your family, the scholarship process is also a way to develop the important skills that will serve you well in whatever you do in your life. The ability to organize, prioritize, write well, match message to audience and most of all, know yourself, are gifts you should give yourself as soon as possible. Use the scholarship process to get yourself ready for the rest of your life.

### **Types of Scholarships Available**

School-Specific Awards: Colleges and universities often have scholarship money available that is used to develop the financial package offered to an applicant who has been granted admission. These scholarships are available under a variety of terms that may include maintaining a certain academic average, pursuing a specific major, etc.

Athletic Scholarships: Many athletes dream of going to college on an athletic scholarship. It's possible to achieve that dream, but these scholarships are highly competitive and the application process is extremely involved. If you are interested in winning an athletic scholarship, go immediately to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) website. Also, contact the financial aid office of the school you hope to attend. They should have lots of information about available awards.

Academic Awards: These merit-based scholarships are awarded by the college or university for academic achievement. Inquire about these awards at your school's financial aid office. You may not even have to apply for an academic award since they are often wrapped into the financial aid package offered by the school, based on your application.

Departmental Awards: Specific departments may have scholarships available to attract or retain students in the department's field of study. If you know what your major will be, contact that department to inquire about scholarships.

Private Organizations: There are thousands of private organizations that offer scholarship awards, ranging from \$50 to \$20,000 and more. Within the "private" category there are many types of organizations to consider, including corporations, religious organizations, unions, local service clubs, military (these scholarships are awarded in return for a tour of duty with the branch of the military supporting your education - be sure you're prepared to fulfill the terms of your scholarship agreement), and other organizations who wish to further their mission by supporting the education of students. This category of scholarships is the reason for using a web search engine to identify suitable opportunities.

### **Online Database of Scholarships**

The best source of scholarship information is contained in the **Internet**, through a variety of scholarship directory sites. You should go through the search process in more than one website. Then, make a combined list of scholarships. For example:

#### ***www.scholarshipscanada.com***

This interesting site offers a free search after registration and profile development. The search results include an indication of the value of the scholarship, maximum awarded, due date and relevance to your situation as well as a way to select offerings that are placed in a "my scholarships" folder.

#### ***www.yconic.com (previously www.studentawards.com)***

This site also features a free search following profile development. Results can be organized by due date and a legend identifies awards available to Canadian students studying in Canada, the United States, or internationally.

One unique find from this search is titled, "Stuck at the Prom" sponsored by the Duck Brand duct tape company. The contest is open to residents of Canada and the United States. You must be 14 years or older and attend a high school prom in the spring. Participants must adorn themselves in stylishly "sticky" fashions made from duct tape and you must enter as a couple. There are three awards available, ranging from \$500 to \$2,500. ***www.ducktapeclub.com***

### **Judging the Scholarship Application**

The evaluation of scholarship applications has some common characteristics:

a) The first step in the judging process is to eliminate as many non-qualifying applications as possible. This strategy reduces the application volume to a more manageable size. Incomplete applications are the first to go. It is not uncommon for an administrative staff person to compare your application to a checklist of initial criteria such as "all blanks on the form filled in," "no spelling errors", and reject any applications that don't meet these initial screens. Just think, you spent hours perfecting that essay, more hours gathering letters of recommendation, more hours assembling the documents, attaching them to the application in the correct order and it gets thrown out because of the word "admissoin" (sp). There's a message here: pay attention to detail. Get help to review your application. Even though you

may not have the best academic average in the pile or the longest list of extracurricular activities, if you're a good proofreader, you have a tremendous advantage working for you.

b) The participants in this round of judging will probably include paid staff and some or all of the judges. If academic achievement is important, evaluators may compare academic averages and eliminate any below a particular cutoff point. The criteria and intensity of scrutiny varies with the goals of the scholarship and the number of awards made. The purpose of this review is to eliminate more applicants.

c) This is the time that judges begin to look carefully at who is presenting her or himself for this scholarship. Does your package of academic success, extracurricular activities, leadership skills and achievements add up to a person worthy of their financial support? This process is subjective. Like anyone, judges will gravitate towards more likable candidates. They are much more likely to favour your cause if they can understand you and really sense that you have something valuable to offer that will be enhanced by support of your post-secondary education. This final stage may include judges picking personal favorites and arguing their merits to the panel, taking votes and re-votes. Finally, the winners will emerge. If you have followed the steps carefully, you may find yourself in the winner's circle.

## Who Are You?

This is the question the scholarship award judges will be asking themselves as they review your application. Your job is to introduce yourself as someone who is deserving of the scholarship they will award. Who are you? If you're not sure, you will have a hard time explaining yourself to the judges. The following questions ask you to think about yourself in relation to the rest of the world and to understand what's special about **you**.

How would you describe yourself?

How would your friends describe you?

How would your parents describe you?

How would your teachers describe you?

Which parts of these descriptions are similar?

Which parts of these descriptions are different and why?

Ideally, how would you wish for people to describe you?

What are the three most important events that have taken place in your life? Why are they important?

What personal accomplishment makes you the most proud?

What are your three greatest strengths?

What three areas of your life need the most improvement?

What is your philosophy of life?

Why do you want to go to college or university?

How do you hope to be different when you graduate college or university?

Describe yourself and what you want to be doing ten years from now.

What has been your most interesting class in high school? Why was it interesting to you?

What are the three worst mistakes you have made in your life? Are you any different now as a result?

Pick two or three extracurricular activities you participate in. Why do you participate?

What are the three biggest obstacles you have overcome in your life?

What person or persons have been influential in your life? Why?

Everyone is special; what makes **you** special?

## Preparing the Application

Filling out the scholarship application is a fact of life when seeking scholarships. Unfortunately, there is no generic form or format; each scholarship fund has its own methods and information needs. You should plan to spend several hours per scholarship application. This time will include gathering materials, filling out the application, preparing the package and potentially writing a short essay.

## The Scholarship Cover Letter

The application cover letter conveys the package from you to the funding organization. It is one more opportunity to demonstrate professionalism and knowledge of appropriate business etiquette. If possible, determine to whom the letter should be addressed. Be sure you have that individual's name and title spelled correctly. Avoid using either, "Dear Sir" or Dear Madam". In the body of the letter, express your pleasure at the opportunity to submit your application for the specific award you are seeking. It's always useful to add a sentence praising the work or the mission of the funding organization. Close the letter by expressing your enthusiasm for participating in the process and always thank the recipient for their time and consideration.

## Forms and Documents

The scholarship application form introduces you to the judges. You need to make that introduction as crisp and business-like as possible. Make copies of the application form so that you can create a working draft. Use that draft to complete the final application form. Type the application form if at all possible. Don't use fancy fonts; stick with standard business fonts like Times New Roman or Arial. Legibility and neatness are **extremely** important. Your application can be eliminated if it cannot be easily read.

Put your name on every page of the application. Many funders prefer that applications be free of staples so they are easier to photocopy or distribute. That means there is the potential for parts of your application to become lost. Placing your name on every page gives your application a fighting chance of being put back together if a page or two gets waylaid during the process. Answer every question. If you don't believe that a question applies to you, don't leave it blank – it could be judged incomplete. Don't mark the question N/A, not applicable. The evaluators may have a different point of view on its applicability and can disqualify you for failing to complete the form. Instead, answer the question if you can. If the question is truly not applicable, write a sentence that describes your situation. For example, if the question is, "What is your military history?" it is preferable to write "I have never served in the military." rather than leave it blank or write N/A.

**Check, check and re-check for typos.** Enlist help in this review as it is very hard to proof read your own material. Inevitably, your eye reads what you thought you wrote, not what actually made it onto the page. A fresh reader will catch the words that you missed and find the spelling problems.

Remember, simple errors will remove you from the competition much more quickly than listing too few club activities. Even if you are not class valedictorian or community volunteer of the year or a survivor of some horrific circumstances with a heroic story to tell, you can still be in the finalist round by being sure you spelled the name of the scholarship fund correctly and attending to all of the other minor details that will make your application perfectly correct and therefore worthy of consideration.

Place the requested documents in the package in the order that they are requested. This consistency makes it easier for evaluators to locate information. It's also simpler for you to check the documents against the list of requirements.

When preparing the applications, follow the directions you are given. Make a complete copy of the application before you send it. Don't skip the transcript or the financial aid statement because you know those are included; it is always important to have a **complete** record of everything you send the funder in exactly the form it was received by the funder. Use an envelope that will hold your application

without folding it. As a matter of presentation, the application will look better without creases. Send the application “return receipt requested” or use a delivery service like FedEx that allows you to track the package’s path and verify who signed for it. In this way you will have proof that the application was received by the organization. If you do not receive verification within the appropriate length of time, follow up. You won’t have a chance at the scholarship if the application never makes it to the in-box.

## **The Scholarship Essay**

This can be the most anxiety-producing part of the application process. Many people struggle with the writing process. Getting started is sometimes the most difficult part of writing for professional writers, let alone scholarship hopefuls. Never start writing without doing a couple of things first:

### *Analyze the Question or Topic*

- Write down the essay question. How many parts does it have? Does the question suggest a structure or order, such as first describe your role in... then tell why it had the following effect... and what you learned from it....
- Do you have to do research first or is this a question that is strictly about you that will come from an analysis of yourself?
- Why have the judges asked this question or posed this topic? Recognizing that all essays are about you, how are the judges planning to get to know you through this essay?

### *Analyze the Organization*

- What is this scholarship about? Who founded it? What is the mission of the organization? Why are they providing scholarship money? Who are the judges? What special points of view do they bring to the judging?
- How do you find out this information? Usually, you can find a great deal of background from the scholarship website or the printed material provided by the scholarship group.

### *Create Goals for the Writing*

Depending on the award and the personal circumstances, a goal of the essay might be to demonstrate a commitment to succeed despite unstable family circumstances such as living in a variety of foster homes, or, using a different approach, a conscious choice to forego balance between academics and family life to pursue a passion for learning about gene mapping in order to search for a cure for the multiple sclerosis that has made a family member an invalid.

### *Develop a Theme*

If the theme of your essay is not immediately clear, break down the work by establishing a set of goals based upon your understanding of the essay’s intent, the mission of the funding organization, etc. These goals may lead you to one or more themes for your essay.

### *Outline Your Response*

Many people write by beginning anywhere with a free flow of ideas that they then mold into an appropriate order. That can work; you can occasionally start a project by writing down random thoughts. However, it is recommended that you try very hard to approach your essay by writing an outline of what you want to say. The outline will assure that you have the right order and that you will cover all of the points you want to cover.

### *It’s Time to Write*

Now it’s time to fill in that outline and tell your story. You already have the basics - a theme in mind, a set of goals to meet, and an outline to work from.

### *It's Time to Re-Write*

You must follow this step because this is not an e-mail or a last minute book report; it's a ticket to money, if you do it right.

### *Show, Don't Tell.*

Go back through your essay. In every sentence where you have *told* the judges something, is there a way to *show* by example? Consider the following.

- *My family does not have a lot of money. I worked my way through high school at Wal-Mart.*  
This is a good piece of information to share. However, the message can be made more vivid by sharing more detail.
- *My family does not have a lot of money. I worked at the local Wal-Mart most evenings and did my homework on the bus ride home or after work.*  
Much better. Now the judges know that you were very busy and can feel the squeeze of needing to earn money and still get your school work done.

### *Present Tense, if Possible*

The present tense allows people to live the information with you. It's not always possible, but it's a great strategy when it can work.

### *Make the Introduction Inviting*

The introduction invites your reader to keep going. This is not the place to summarize – why read the rest if you get the picture in the first paragraph? Instead, encourage the next step. How? Use emotion, raise a question, or create surprise with a surprising fact. Here is a possible opening for a discussion of a student's work with a literacy program.

- *I am a literacy volunteer. I did not decide to do this work because studies report that 21% of adults (over 40 million) in this country are functionally illiterate or because 43% of people with reading deficiencies live in poverty or even because 70% of people with reading deficiencies have no job or only a part time job. My reason for becoming a literacy volunteer was much simpler. My Dad couldn't read.*

The reader will be hooked. One might not really have known how bad the literacy problem is but, now the reader will want to know if this person was able to teach her Dad to read and how this person, with an illiterate parent, made it to the point of applying for a scholarship and heading for college or university.

### *Create Workable Transitions*

The trick is to show your reader where they are going next and why it's a logical next step. Try not to use standard transitional phrases like, "Secondly" or "As a consequence". Try repeating the prior thought and connecting to the next task. For example, "Once I learned how to scale rocks on the artificial rock face, I needed to try out my skills on a real mountain."

### *A Compelling Conclusion*

As in the introduction, don't summarize. Essays are too short to need a review at the conclusion. Instead, re-emphasize the main point or circle back to the beginning and tie the loop. Consider the literacy introduction. The body of the essay should have been about the student, her efforts as a volunteer, her feelings about the difficulties faced by those who can't read, her recognition of the gift that reading is and her decision to pursue a teaching career as a result of her experience. This story begs for a conclusion that answers the question, "Did her Dad learn to read?"

### *Take a Breather*

After you write and revise your essay, you need to take a break from it so that you can return with a fresh set of eyes. It's amazing how the sparkling prose you thought you wrote turns out to need a lot more work once you've gotten a little distance. Even more amazing is the realization that some of your writing is actually much better than you expected, now that you've followed some very standard writing rules.

### **\*\* Use Outside Readers**

Ask people to read your essay and help you with honest feedback. Ask them what they liked most and least. Ask if the essay is written in a logical fashion with reasoning that is supported by examples or other proof. Ask your readers to correct typos, grammar, etc. Every new pair of eyes helps.

### *Congratulate Yourself*

The essay is by far the most difficult part of the application. You have overcome the biggest obstacle to applying for a scholarship.

## **Letters of Recommendation**

Letters of recommendation show that people in your life respect your skills and accomplishments and are willing to say so in writing and sign their names.

### **Who Should You Ask?**

First of all, the person who writes a recommendation for you should be someone who knows you relatively well. That doesn't mean that only long time associates qualify. It does mean that the recommender has had enough interaction with you to give a genuine assessment of your skills and achievements.

The people you choose to write recommendations must have the ability to write well. These letters are very influential in your case for a scholarship and you need to be sure that your recommenders can translate their thoughts about you into writing. Try to select the best writers available to you.

It is also very important that your recommenders can be relied upon to produce the necessary letters in the right timeframe. There is no way to be sure on this point but it's sensible to avoid people who have the reputation of missing deadlines or being procrastinators.

Where do you find people to write recommendations for you? Consider teachers in classes where you did well, athletic coaches, club advisors, volunteer work supervisors, employers, religious leaders, friends of the family who are familiar with you and hold a position that lends credibility to the recommendation such as the family's attorney, your doctor or a local businessman.

### **Analyze Your Need for Letters**

Once you know which scholarships you will be applying for, review any directions for the letters of recommendation, i.e., some applications will ask that the letters of recommendation address specific topics, while others will simply ask for letters. The goal of your review is to determine where you may be able to use the same letter of recommendation for multiple applications. Be sure that each letter of recommendation is addressed to a specific individual or at least to a specific scholarship fund.

## **Requesting a Letter of Recommendation**

First and foremost, please recognize that writing a letter of recommendation is not a simple task. You will be asking someone to work hard on a good letter that will represent you well. Approach your potential letter writers with humility and acknowledge upfront the commitment you are requesting and

your appreciation for their help. Offer to make the job as easy as possible for them by doing some or all of the following things:

Provide all the information your letter writer will need. Make sure that she or he has a written explanation of the topics to be covered in the application.
--

Provide a list of your extracurricular activities and volunteer contributions.
--

Provide a copy of one of your essays so the writer has a sense of your approach to the application process and gains a bit more insight into your life.

Give your letter writers as much lead time as possible. It is very likely that some of your letter writers have been asked to provide recommendations for others as well. Asking and providing materials early gives you the best chance of getting your recommendation letter on time. Check in with your letter writer at some point in the process to be sure she or he has everything needed. This check is both a supportive touch and also allows you to politely jog the writer's memory and be sure your letter is in the works. Be sure to ask that the writer use official letterhead if possible. After you receive the letter, write a note of appreciation. Writers of letters of recommendation agree to do so out of their own enthusiasm for students going on to college or university and their admirable interest in being supportive. Let your letter writers know that you appreciate their help.

## The Interview

Congratulations! If you have made it to the interview stage, you are a finalist, entering the last phase of evaluation. The face-to-face interview is an excellent way for the judges to get to know you and, particularly, assess your maturity, composure, performance under pressure, etc.

## Preparation

It is impossible to predict what questions you may be asked in a personal interview but it is possible to prepare yourself by working out answers to some of the more common questions that get asked in interviews, whether for scholarships or employment. Write down the answers to these questions:

What are your greatest strengths?
-----------------------------------

What are your career goals?
-----------------------------

Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years?
---

Tell me about a personal achievement that makes you proud.
--

Tell me about a mistake that you made and what you learned from it.
---

Who has influenced your life and why?
---------------------------------------

Why would you be an excellent recipient of ___ scholarship?
---

These are the basics. Know these answers cold. Next, think specifically about the scholarship award that you are seeking. Be sure you are very well informed about the organization.

What is the mission of the organization offering the award?
---

Who have they given the award to in the past and why?
---

Who are the judges?
---------------------

What is it about your application that made you a finalist?
---

Use this information to develop responses that you may be able to introduce into the discussion to provide the content that you would like to be sure that the judges hear from you. Finally, prepare

yourself to make a good impression. The judges will use the interview to get to know you better and you are working from the advantage that they are already supporters. Help them to help you have a great interview by being as genuinely pleased to be there as you can. Let your enthusiasm for your education show. The personal interview can be a wonderful experience if you can approach it as an opportunity rather than as a trial.

## **Scholarship Renewal**

You did it! You won a scholarship. Your hard work has paid off. The final step is to be sure that you keep your scholarship in succeeding years.

### *Renew-ability*

Be sure you understand whether or not your scholarship is renewable. In some cases, scholarships can be renewed yearly for the entire four years. However, the renewal may not be automatic. You may need to apply again, demonstrate financial need again, provide tuition bill copies and/or meet other criteria to receive a renewed award.

### *Ongoing Eligibility*

You must also understand the terms of your scholarship. You don't want to lose funding by failing to provide a progress report or not carrying the necessary course load. Here are some of the issues to fully understand:

- Athletic participation

Athletic scholarships usually require that you play the sport for which the award was granted. Be sure you understand what will happen if an injury takes you out of play for a season or you are barred from playing due to academic probation.

- Field of Study

If you received an award based upon study in a particular field and you make a decision to change majors, you may lose the award. Be sure you understand the consequences of decisions about course of study so that you can prepare for any loss of funding.

- Academic Progress

Your scholarship may require that you maintain a minimum academic average and/or make satisfactory progress toward a degree. Be sure you understand the impact of taking a lighter course load, skipping a semester, or failing to maintain a satisfactory academic average.

- Choice of School

If the award is tied to attendance at a specific school, you will lose the scholarship if you choose to transfer.

## **Filing New Applications**

Scholarship support drops off considerably after first year for the following reasons:

1. Once students are in college or university, they do not tend to apply for scholarships in succeeding years.
2. A number of scholarships are for the first year only.
3. Students who have renewable scholarships fail to re-apply.

It is certainly possible to continue to apply for scholarships throughout your post-secondary educational career. The same organization and efficiency is required each year to determine which awards to apply for, gather the appropriate materials and assemble complete packages in the right timeframe.

## Written Resources

### *Scholarship Directories*

There are many excellent compilations of scholarship information available. You may not be inclined to purchase a book of your own, preferring to conduct your search on-line, but be sure to check out Scholarship – 2011 (B. Harris) and Winning Scholarships (M. Howell) in the Guidance Office and other resources in the Career Centre (at the back of the Library). There's great value in looking through printed listings for scholarships that the search engines might not have picked up on your behalf.

### *Guidance Office Postings*

Listen to announcements and check in with Guidance throughout the year to look for local scholarships that may not have been picked up by the major directories (i.e May Court Club of Barrie, Reid Scholarship, Eastview Scholastic Foundation, etc.)

## Don't Forget...

Donors have withdrawn scholarships in the past because letters of appreciation (thank you notes) were not received by the donating association or individual from the award recipient. If you are fortunate enough to receive an award, **PLEASE** send a note of appreciation so that awards keep being offered for future graduating classes.



## References

Scholarship Help  
Tips for Applying for Scholarships

[www.scholarshiphelp.org/](http://www.scholarshiphelp.org/)  
<http://www.scholarshipscanada.com/Section/9/Tips>