

# WRITING ESSAYS

# Scholarship and Application Essays

Adapted from Kansas State University College of Arts and Sciences, 24 April 2002. 24 March 2005.  
<http://www.ksu.edu/artsci/scholarship/essay.htm>

For more information, visit the Learning Services web site: [www.fccj.org/campuses/south/learning\\_cent/learning\\_cent.htm](http://www.fccj.org/campuses/south/learning_cent/learning_cent.htm)

## Writing a Personal Statement

Personal statements are the most common type of scholarship essay. These tips follow that format.

Here are three ideas to help you keep the task in perspective:

1. Space constraints are often frustrating . . . but your competitors face them too.
2. Scholarship essays can pave the road for graduate school essays and cover letter in the future.
3. Many students find that writing a good personal statement helps them clarify who they are and where they are going.

### Get Started

Two mildly contradictory and equally valid bits of advice:

1. Think about what you might say about yourself before you start writing.
  - Scribble down a list of experiences and accomplishments. Do not limit yourself to resume items. What stories do you share with friends? What events from the past still linger in your thoughts today? What has changed you recently?
  - Talk to other people. What would they include in your biography?
  - Simply reflect. What is important to you? What gets you excited or moves you to act? What threads form patterns in your life? What do you hope to accomplish?
2. Use the writing process as a vehicle for discovery.
  - Consider writing several different drafts. Experiment.
  - Some students start by outlining the points they intend to make.
  - Try banging out a draft within some set time limit (like thirty minutes). Read it later to look for gems twinkling amid the rocks.
  - Writing is recursive. The fifteenth paragraph may suddenly suggest a better direction for the third sentence.

### Read the Instructions

Surely a step that top students would never skip. Right?

1. Adhere to the minimum font size and maximum number of words.
2. However, only pare down to the word limit late in the process.
3. Different awards want different things. Make sure you answer the right questions.
4. Make sure you fit the award. Quit writing and find a different scholarship if you are distorting or contorting yourself to fit their criteria.

## Address Fundamental Questions

Regardless of what they ask you . . . readers typically want answers to the following questions:

1. What are your goals?
2. Why are you dedicated to them?
3. What in your life reflects that commitment?
4. What matters to you?
5. How do you see the world?
6. What makes you a good fit for this award?
7. What makes you stand out from other applicants?



Answer explicitly

Answer implicitly

## Content

What belongs in a good personal statement is unique to each individual. Nevertheless, the following ideas might help.

1. Talk about things that you would enjoy discussing at length.
2. Choose a few key points to develop . . . three or four perhaps.
3. Include concrete examples to illustrate larger themes. Choose anecdotes that show you taking action in your world.
4. Avoid braggy generalizations. Instead, share specific incidents to show your strengths.
5. Ask yourself what readers might find memorable and/or unique about you.
6. Have any books or classes or artistic encounters profoundly shaped or shaken your outlook?
7. Write from a positive perspective.
8. Consider how your essay fits with everything else you submit.

## Package Carefully

All scholarships value good writing. It measures your ability to communicate well and think clearly.

1. Scrutinize every word as you near the final draft. Edit as if they cost twenty dollars each.
2. Avoid technical jargon when possible. Your readers are highly intelligent but not necessarily specialists in your field.
3. Get to the point.
4. Elaborate similes and other forms of narrative artifice generally fail.
5. Establish clear relationships between your paragraphs. Write explicit transitions.
6. Including quotes from others is typically cliché.
7. Your essay should read quickly and easily. Creating an ornate garden of fancy phrases and showy words is not the goal here.
8. The purpose of eloquence is to magnify the power of the idea.
9. Consult *Style Tips for Scholarship Essays* for more details about packaging.

## After Drafting

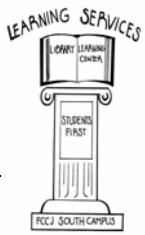
Here are some thoughts regarding the revision process:

1. The best essays will get revised and reworked. Get input from mentors and friends. Ask smart people who are willing to criticize your work.
2. Stay objective. Try not to fall madly in love with your first draft.
3. Set your latest draft aside if time permits. Read it later with fresh eyes.
4. They say that a picture equals a thousand words. Reverse that idea as you read your essay. Do your thousand words add up to one good picture of you?

## Other Sources

Get a second opinion.

1. *How to Write with Style* by Kurt Vonnegut.
2. *Notes on the Marshall Scholarship Application* by Louis Blair and Cheryl Foster.
3. Marshall and Rhodes Scholarships: Notes for Truman Scholars by Louis Blair and Mary Tolar



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# Style Tips for Scholarship and Application Essays

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## How to Polish Your Writing.

Execution of detail can make or break your personal statement when the field is very competitive.

### Formatting

The goal of formatting is to make the format disappear.

1. Follow the instructions. Format as directed.
2. No instructions provided? Then ease of reading should instruct your choices.
3. No larger than 12 point type if no parameters are given. No smaller than 10 point type.
4. Minimum margins of one inch.
5. Do not justify your text. **Align Left** is the right setting.
6. **Times New Roman** is typical. Your font should have serifs. No funky fonts.
7. Always type it (or word process it) even if they say *Type or Print Neatly*.
8. Almost all top awards prefer ordinary white paper. Seriously.
9. Are you supposed to sign the essay?

### Punctuation & Grammar

Good punctuation tells the reader how words and phrases relate to each other. Good grammar tells the reader that you are careful and precise when you communicate.

1. Two spaces at the end of a sentence. One space after a comma, colon or semicolon.
2. Use complete sentences, even though there are ten fragments on this page.
3. Learn how to use commas, semicolons and colons effectively and correctly.
4. ~~It is the passive voice that should be revised.~~ Revise the passive voice.
5. Subject-verb disagreement ~~ruin~~ ruins a sentence.
6. Contractions are often considered too informal for scholarship essays.
7. Many points of grammar are not mentioned here due to space. They still matter.
8. Rewrite the sentence (or split it into two) if the grammar looks wrong but the remedy eludes you.
9. Artfully break the rules no more than once or twice per essay.

### Technique

Even after you learn the grip and the stance, you can still always work on your swing.

1. Cut words that do not detract from the sentence if eliminated. Do the same for sentences within paragraphs.
2. ~~Seek to eliminate, so to speak,~~ empty ~~and meaningless~~ phrases.
3. On the other hand, transitional words and phrases are priceless. They show the reader how sentences and paragraphs relate to one another.
4. Use the first personal singular. That teacher who told you **never** to use "I" was incorrect.
5. Variety is good though. Try using your experiences or your actions as the subject when you feel that you have used "I" once too often.
6. Avoid repetitive sentence structure and vary the length of your sentences. It makes the prose sing.

### Other Resources

- *Elements of Style* by Strunk and White. A classic. Complete text available at [www.bartleby.com/141](http://www.bartleby.com/141)
- *On Writing Well* by William Zinnser. Another classic.
- *How to Write with Style* by Kurt Vonnegut. *How to Punctuate* and *How to Write Clearly* are two other essays that may also interest you.

## For More Information

- [http://www.transcendmag.com/scholarship\\_essay\\_tips.htm](http://www.transcendmag.com/scholarship_essay_tips.htm)
- <http://www.essayedge.com/privateschool/editing/>
- <http://www.back2college.com/scholaessay.htm>
- [http://www.carpedm.com/link\\_pages/schol\\_essay.html](http://www.carpedm.com/link_pages/schol_essay.html)
- <http://www.standoutessay.com/>
- [http://www.internationalstudent.com/essay\\_writing/index/shtml](http://www.internationalstudent.com/essay_writing/index/shtml)
- [http://www.library.thinkquest.org/C005172/scholarship\\_essay.htm](http://www.library.thinkquest.org/C005172/scholarship_essay.htm)
- <http://www.medi-smart.com/scholar1.htm>
- <http://www.chci.org/chicyouth/resources/writingessay.htm>