

Tips for Writing a Successful College Scholarship Essay

By Executive Director Nancy Savage

The college essay, whether it be for entrance or a scholarship, is often one of the first times that a student is asked to write to influence others for personal selection. Adopting basic writing tools is necessary to be successful in this process. These same tools and developed skills will continue to be useful as in the application for graduate programs, further educational funding, and positions after graduation. There are many books available and even courses on writing that are geared towards selling yourself. Writing skills will continue to be essential in the workplace.

- Read the interview question several times and figure out what your message will be. Each person is a unique individual and you need the readers of your essay to learn about you. Adhere to guidelines set forth concerning the essay.
- Hook your reviewers from the beginning paragraph. You will want to hook the reader from the beginning of your essay and make them want to read more.
- Develop your personal story that you want to tell in your message. Write about a topic important to you. Do not stress your need for financial support. Start early.
- Prepare an outline of your essay with a beginning and an end. Present your message logically. Make three or four main points. Write a topic sentence for each paragraph.
- Write to stand out from the crowd.
- Gather the data you need to write your essay. You want to improve the message with pertinent facts and figures to provide impact.
- When you describe what you have done, be specific. Describe your level of responsibility. Describe and quantify your accomplishments. Was your work completed on time? Was it under budget or result in cost savings? How did the results compare with the results of others?
- Write powerful uncomplicated sentences. Use the shortest word to convey your thought. Condense your text to the fewest possible words. Write in the active, not passive voice.
- Shorter is better when writing your essay. Space is valuable.
- The concluding paragraph should clinch the message. It will form the final impression and should reflect what you learned and how the experience changed your life.
- Review your first draft, purge useless or redundant words and revise the product. After the first draft, edit and proofread and then prepare a final draft.
- Proofread. Check for punctuation and agreement in subjects and verbs. Use the review features that your computer program offers, but do not rely solely on this. When you have finished editing and proofreading, put the essay away and go back over the essay the next day and tighten further. Ask someone else with known writing skills to go over the essay. Another pair of eyes never hurts and often helps.