

A good scholarship essay ...

Scholarship essays captivate readers and encourage them to care about you. Writing a good essay is not always easy. It takes time to put words on paper and finesse each sentence to convey the correct meaning.

While there is no right or wrong way to write a great essay, a good scholarship essay ...

- ... is original.
- ... states clearly why you deserve to win.
- ... has a main point.
- ... avoids meaningless information.
- ... is more than just a sob story.
- ... is honest.

Scholarship committees review many applications and may use the essays to differentiate applicants. Because the large volume of applicants makes it impossible for the committees to interview each candidate, a coherent and interesting essay may be what distinguishes you from another candidate.

The following information is essential to writing a successful scholarship essay.

Consider the Topic

If the essay is asking you to address what motivated you to select your major or your career goals, do not submit an essay you wrote for your English class simply because it fits the word limit requirement.

Think of the essay as a scholarship interview. The major difference is that you do not have the opportunity to convince the committee in person to give you the scholarship; you must convince them with your essay.

Prepare your Facts

Think about each question or topic and make an outline to fit.

Make a list of your achievements/accomplishments (both academic and other), community involvement, leadership positions or other roles you have served in school or your community.

Make a list of your personal characteristics including your strengths, weaknesses, and any obstacles you have overcome or are currently confronting.

Determine key pieces of information you feel the committee should know about you and have concrete examples to demonstrate your points.

Writing the Essay

The introduction: Begin with a strong introduction. You want your essay to stand out from all the others. Be sure your introduction captures the readers' attention and compels them to learn as much as they can about you in the following paragraphs.

Be personal: Make sure the committee can assess what type of person you are and what motivates you.

Be specific: Give examples. Do not simply tell the committee you are a leader; give an example of how you have demonstrated leadership.

Turn negatives into positives: If you have an obvious weakness such as limited extracurricular activities, show the committee that you have been particularly involved with your family or within the classes you have taken, depending on your personal situation.

Follow standard grammar and writing rules: Make sure your body paragraphs relate to your introduction and that your conclusion summarizes the points you have made in your essay.

Review your Essay

Proofread, proofread, and proofread!

Have several people read your essay.

Edit it for clarity, conciseness, grammar, and spelling.

Did you address the essay topic?

Does the essay convey who you are and why you should receive a scholarship beyond the fact that you need the money?

Is the essay interesting? Does it come alive when you read it?

Did you provide examples of your skills and abilities rather than broad statements and claims?

Does the essay meet the word count requirement?

Mt. San Jacinto College

Request for Scholarship Form

General Information:

In order to effectively support your scholarship application, please complete all the information asked below so the person (i.e., faculty, administrator, etc.) will be able to write a strong letter on your behalf. Please spend extra time and be thorough in responding to each question.

Name: _____ Student ID# _____

Major: _____ G.P.A. _____

Educational Goal: Associate's Degree Bachelor's Degree Master's Degree

Obstacles and Barriers:

Briefly explain any obstacles/barriers you have experienced while pursuing your education:

Explain how you have overcome these obstacles/barriers:

Explain how these obstacles/barriers were related to the major you are pursuing:

Describe any obstacles/barriers you anticipate facing while pursuing your education:

Mt. San Jacinto College
Request for Scholarship Form

Community Involvement:

List any community involvement you currently participate in:

List your future goals for community involvement:

Other:

List some of your interest and hobbies:

List some of your beliefs and ethics:

Additional:

Anything about yourself that you would like to add:

Sample Essay 1

I started tenth grade three years ago after my family moved to the United States from Mexico. I had to face the problems of not knowing the language or how the education system worked. I felt alone. Everything was different from my country. I could not express myself with the people around me. Often I felt frustrated. Many people told me that graduating would be hard for me because I did not know the language and was just starting to learn English.

Instead of being upset about this comment, it motivated me to study hard and to get good grades. My goal then was to graduate from high school with good grades and on time with the rest of the students my age. My counselor gave me credit for my transcript I brought from Mexico. She told me if I finished the requirements for graduation, I could graduate with other students my age.

Finally I did it. I graduated from high school on time. I was fifth place in my class and so happy to receive my diploma with high honors.

My family had a large part in my achievements in high school and continues to be a source of motivation in my achievements in college. I am the youngest in the family and the first one to graduate from high school and to attend college. My sister quit school and got married at an early age. This was another thing that motivates me to continue my education through college. I want very much to make my parents proud of me.

My family encourages me to be part of activities at school and in the community. Although I was involved in many activities in high school, here at San Diego State University, I find that it is harder for me to be involved in extracurricular activities, because my class schedule does not allow it and I have to take the bus 21 miles to get home. But I would like to join some organizations like Associated Students.

I like to work with people who are interested in developing the potential of students. I am also interested in the Native American Student Alliance student organization because I would like to know about their culture before I graduate.

In my community, I am involved in the youth group and in the choir of my church. I sing at mass every Sunday morning. In the church youth group I am the treasurer, and I am in charge of the group's activities once a month. These activities demand commitment, responsibility and time.

College education is very important for my future. College is my opportunity to improve my life by having more opportunities to get better jobs, and to encourage my family to go back to school. In college you look into different ethnic groups, their backgrounds, style of thinking and ways to solve problems in the world. I think because I want to be a journalist, I need to have an open mind to understand the people in the community and to know more about the world in which we live.

My goal is to become a journalist who would be in touch with the people, helping them to make this world a more pleasant place in which to live.

Sample Essay 2

I am currently enrolled in my third semester as a full time graduate student in the Master of Science Degree in Counseling. Upon successful completion of this program, I will earn an M.S. in School Counseling with the California Pupil Personnel Services credential, allowing me to practice as a school psychologist in California.

My goal to pursue a career in the field of education has been a part of my plans since my early teen years. From my first summer job to my current position, the majority of my work and volunteer experience has involved counseling and children. To know that I can make a positive impact on a child's life is rewarding for me.

I was enticed to choose school psychology as my career by its varied and challenging nature within an educational setting. The responsibilities of the profession involve, but are not limited to, counseling, testing and assessment, behavioral intervention, and classroom observation. A school psychologist never knows exactly what the day will include, much like my current position as a counseling assistant at Castle Park Middle School in Chula Vista. From this experience I know that spontaneity and high energy are vital for my growth and satisfaction within my career.

As an undergraduate I dedicated my best efforts toward my education and as a result, I graduated with high honors from the University of California, Santa Barbara earning a B.A. in Communications. I soon attained full-time employment with the San Diego Center for Children, where I continue to volunteer on various weekends and holidays. This facility is a residential treatment program for children with severe emotional disturbances resulting from abuse, neglect, homelessness, or abandonment. My main responsibilities are to aid children in learning and carrying out daily living skills, counsel them in their relations with peers and adults, serve as a responsible role model, and to work closely with other members of the treatment team, such as therapists and social workers implementing the Center's programs. All of this has proven to be an invaluable learning experience.

Complementing this experience is my current position as a counseling assistant. My responsibility is to provide various psychological and educational services to students who need additional assistance to succeed in school and in the community. My day is usually filled with activities such as group, individual and crisis counseling, conflict resolution, behavioral observation, and assessments. I also assist in training and coordinating 25 students to become peer counselors. I feel very fortunate to be involved in Castle Park's counseling program. I am proud of my work there and feel it is excellent preparation for my future role as a school psychologist.

Volunteer work has also been an activity that I like to include in my life. As I previously mentioned, I currently volunteer at the San Diego Center for Children. During my senior year of college I served as a volunteer, mentoring gifted children through my university's honors program. Helping a child realize his or her own potential gives me a strong sense of accomplishment. Both of these experiences have been emotionally rewarding.

I hope that by sharing my activities and goals, I have been able to give you a glimpse into the person I am and what I hope to achieve. I have included what I have felt to be the most significant influences on my career choice. I expect graduate school to continue to be a journey which I embark upon with great enthusiasm.

Sample Essay 3

Dear Scholarship Committee:

If the 18 year-old James would have known and understood the value of higher education the way the now 34 year-old James does, you would have received this letter 16 years ago. Perhaps the passage of 16 years and the experiences contained in them will prove to be an advantage that will make further education of the 34 year-old more fulfilling personally and more beneficial to family, friends and the community.

I am, first of all a husband and father. Jan, my wife of eight years, and I have two beautiful children—our daughter Sue is six, and our son Josh is three. My marriage and the birth of our children are the most satisfying, inspiring events in my life. Another event, not exactly a positive one at first glance, is one of the reasons you have received this letter.

For nine years I was a journeyman carpenter working for several framing contractors on both residential and commercial projects. My duties included all aspects of framing construction as well

as supervisory responsibilities. Then, my life changed drastically. A wall and beam assembly, later estimated to weigh some 3,000 pounds, fell and broke my left leg in several places.

Since this career ending injury, however, more positives than negatives have emerged. Despite long therapy sessions and several follow-up operations, I can honestly say that the worst consequence of breaking my leg was that I broke my leg. The incident has allowed me the opportunity to spend more time with my wife and children and to seek a college education.

Before the accident I was physically active at work, in recreation, and in my participation as a semi-professional baseball player with the San Diego Marlins. At that point I hadn't thought seriously about furthering my education. Because of my injury, I was faced with the realization that I was not indestructible. This revelation, along with much prompting from my wife, encouraged me to view this as a chance for a positive change and a more secure future.

I am the first in my family to attend a university. In the spring of 2006, I enrolled in 18 units at Miramar College. Being a self-motivated, goal-oriented person, I was able to achieve a 4.0 grade point average and a place on the Dean's Honors List. Despite my subsequent operations, I have maintained a 4.0 grade point average after 75 college units. My goal is to earn a Bachelor's degree. I selected a Psychology major and Recreation Administration minor to improve myself and my ability to interact and communicate effectively with others.

One of my most time-consuming activities, as well as one of the most rewarding, is my involvement with the San Diego Unitarian Church. My responsibilities as volunteer youth counselor and advisor for our 20 Southern California congregations include planning and promotion of youth trips and activities which include visiting the sick and elderly and various musical performances throughout the year. My new communication skills and the broader view provided by the university experience, will be invaluable in my relationships with these youth and my future career.

This 34 year-old returning student has learned to appreciate the generosity of others. I would be honored and grateful for whatever assistance you are willing to provide. Your investment in me will not only assist me in the accomplishment of my personal goals, but will benefit our community. Thank you for your consideration.

Sample Essay 4

Throughout my childhood, many individuals posed that infamous question: "So, what are you going to be when you grow up?" I cringe even now as I write it. During my childhood, the answer came quickly and with assurance: "A doctor." I don't know quite when I settled on that profession, but there it was, for all to marvel. My high school education was organized to take advantage of all the honors courses my school offered, as I knew this would look much more attractive when I applied to college and eventually medical school. I graduated top of my class with a 4.0 grade point average and was selected Valedictorian.

My first year at college as a pre-med student resembled not so much a pristine haven of learning as a carefree romp. I imagined that college grades would be as effortless to attain as high school grades had been. My roommate nearly called the emergency room when I received my grades. The next semester was even worse. To further my frustration and despondency, I was also trying to come to terms with my budding sexuality, and coming out of the closet as a gay man in a conservative community. In the end, due to family pressure, I left school.

I drifted rather aimlessly for the next few months, until I found a job as an accounting clerk, a far cry from my dreams of being a doctor. I tried to reason with myself that it was a temporary setback, and that I would attend another school later that year. It would take many years to realize that dream.

Finally, after years of drudgery, I made it to the pinnacle of my career as a controller for a major engineering firm. One morning, I woke up and realized for perhaps the millionth time that I was miserable. I decided then and there, that no matter what transpired, I would return to school. Looking back, I realize that the time I spent working was extraordinarily helpful, as it allowed me to return to school with increased organizational skills and the intense desire to perform well.

Since returning, I have maintained a 3.8 cumulative grade point average and have been admitted to the English honors program, I have been given the opportunity to study under some of the best teachers at the university. My educational process remains enthralling, as I continue the journey to my degree.

To this end, I have also dedicated myself to working with important organizations on campus. I am involved with the substance abuse prevention group on campus, as well as the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Student Union, for which I was the director last year. This year I was elected President of Sigma Tau Delta.

I volunteer outside the university as well, with such organizations as San Diego HIV Consumer Council and Mama's Kitchen, a hot food delivery service for home bound AIDS patients. I also volunteer at the San Diego Freedom Ranch, a recovery unit for substance abuse. I am extremely rewarded in myriad ways with this work, and strive to give back and help others through my experience.

I plan on continuing my education throughout the next few years as I endeavor to pursue my doctorate in English Literature. In this way, I will be able to realize my childhood dream of becoming a "doctor," but in a much different way than I ever imagined. Of course, I don't suppose that small child would mind very much.

Sample Letter 1

Mission Valley Lions Club

San Diego, CA 92108

Dear Lions Club Members,

I was both surprised and honored to receive the scholarship from your organization. I am aware of some of the things you do for our community, particularly in support of education.

I appreciate your confidence in me and willingness to contribute to my future education. I am transferring from Grossmont Community College and look forward to completing my Bachelor's Degree at San Diego State University. At the current time, I plan on majoring in Business Administration and Interior Design in hopes of one day opening my own design business.

Again, thank you for investing in my future.

Sincerely,



Sample Letter 2

Dear Members of the Transportation Association of San Diego,

Three years ago this fall I started my first year at San Diego State University committed to earning a degree in Environmental Engineering with a Military Science minor. To enrich my military education, I contracted for four years in the university's ROTC program. Throughout my first summer, I learned how to work with my squad members during Basic ROTC training.

These past three years have been very challenging, but I expect the knowledge I have gained has prepared me for the rest of my life. During the academic year, my time was solely devoted to my studies. In the summer, I participate in research programs that are searching for methods of decontaminating biological warfare agents. This summer, before I enter my senior year this fall, I will attend Advanced Camp where I will be able to put into practice the leadership principles and theories learned in the classroom. I also found time to work on my leadership skills training freshmen during their Basic Training exercises.

I am on schedule to graduate from San Diego State University with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Engineering and a minor in Military Science. I look forward to serving my country and I expect to be commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Army. After graduation, I will attend the Military Intelligence Officer Basic Course in Arizona. I plan to take advantage of my time in the military to put to practical use the education gained at SDSU and from the Army ROTC.

As anyone attending college knows, the cost of fees, books and materials, and living expenses are daunting. The annual scholarship I received from the Transportation Association was essential in helping me achieve my goals.

Thank you again for your generosity.

Respectfully,

Luisa Sanchez

Sample Letter 3

Miriam J. Alstead
Bear Valley, CA

Dear Trustees of the Jonathan Giver Scholarship:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support of the "Jonathan Giver Scholarship for Academic Excellence." As one of this year's recipients, I am grateful for the opportunities this award will provide me. I rely on financial aid, grants and student loans to help finance my education. Receiving this scholarship will help reduce my financial burdens and provide assistance for me as I continue pursuing my education.

Attending San Diego State University has always been my dream. My mother and father met at SDSU and growing up, we often came to campus to attend football and basketball games. I am from Bear Valley, CA, and graduated from Bear Valley High School with honors. I am a member of Gamma Sigma Alpha sorority, and I participate in the SDSU Women's Soccer Sports Club. I am also involved with the Journalism Club and I work part-time at Aztec Shops Book Store. Upon completion of my degree I will pursue a career in investigative news reporting.

Once again, thank you for supporting the students of San Diego State University.

Your generosity truly makes a difference.

Sincerely,

Miriam J. Alstead

Sample Letter 4

Mr. David Gordon
Managing Director
San Diego Board of Trade

Dear Mr. Gordon:

I want to thank you and the San Diego Board of Trade (SDBOT) for sponsoring and funding scholarships at San Diego State University (SDSU). As this year's recipient of the "San Diego Board of Trade Admission Scholarship in Commerce and Management," I wish to express my thanks to you and your organization for your generosity and for looking out for business students, such as myself, who are in financial need.

I knew that by selecting SDSU I was already headed for a great future, supplemented with an enriching education. This scholarship award, thanks to the kindness of the Board, will only further assist in achieving my education and career goals, and increase my chances of success. Without a doubt, this award will prove to be extremely valuable for me, helping to reduce the financial burdens of pursuing a degree in Business Administration.

I hope to be able to contribute to the business community of San Diego with an internship next summer and business career in San Diego after I graduate.

Once again, I want to thank you for the San Diego Board of Trade's generosity and kind spirit in funding this scholarship, which has provided support and encouragement for both my family and me. I would also appreciate if you would please convey my deep thanks to the other members of the Board. As a reader of your publication, I have seen the various fundraising events the Board hosts to provide students like me, assistance with their postsecondary education. I thank you for your kindness and the SDBOT's community activities that are held in support of SDSU students.

I hope to become an individual that makes your institution proud, epitomizing all of the values your organization stands for and by which it has created its highly-regarded reputation.

With sincere thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".