Scholarship Tips

A Reference Guide to Finding and Winning Scholarships

Why apply for scholarships?

We all know that the price of a university education is constantly rising. And, unfortunately, college won’t get any cheaper. Applying for scholarships can help ease the burden of these rising costs. We encourage our students to apply for lots of scholarships, no matter how small the award amounts may seem. Those $500 scholarships add up quick. Students and parents don’t want to be burdened with loan debt for years after graduation. The fact of the matter is that scholarships and grants can help offset the costs of college. As a student, you have to put in your time and effort to apply for some of the thousands of scholarships that are available.

When should I start looking?

It is never too early to start looking for scholarships. You may be able to apply for some scholarships before you become a senior. It’s also a great idea to “bookmark” scholarships as you find them. This way when it comes to your senior year, you have your years of searching at your fingertips!
Top 13 Tips to Finding Scholarships

1. Start searching for scholarships as soon as possible. Don’t wait until the spring of your senior year in high school to start searching, or you’ll miss half the deadlines. There are many scholarships available to students in grades K-11, not just high school seniors.

2. Ask your guidance counselor for available scholarships. Also make sure that you check the Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne’s website for scholarships. The IPFW Upward Bound office also has scholarship resource books available and information about Indiana TRiO and MAEOPP scholarships.

3. To win more scholarships, apply to every scholarship for which you are eligible. It’s a numbers game. Even among talented students, winning involves a bit of luck, not just skill. Pursue less competitive scholarships, such as small awards and essay contests. They are easier to win and help you win bigger scholarships. You can’t win if you don’t apply. It gets easier after your first 6 applications. Essays can be reused and tailored to each new application.

4. Don’t miss deadlines. Use checklists and a calendar to get organized. Schedule time every week dedicated to finding an applying for scholarships.

5. Tailor your application to the sponsor’s goals. Read and follow instructions carefully.

6. If you have difficulty writing essays, record yourself as you answer the questions out loud and transcribe the recording. Most people think and speak faster than they can write or type. Write an outline afterward to organize your thoughts.

7. Personalize your essay and be passionate. Write about something of interest to you. Make your application stand out from the crowd. Talk about your impact on other people. Give examples and be specific.

8. Google your name to ensure that you have a professional online presence. Use a clean email address such as firstname.lastname@gmail.com. Review your Facebook, Twitter, and other online accounts and remove inappropriate and immature material. When the competition is close, some scholarship search committees look to these websites to find out more about students.

9. Proofread a printed copy of your essay and the application for spelling and grammar errors.

10. Make a photocopy of your application before mailing it. If you send the application by mail, make sure you get a tracking number so you can be sure it arrives.

11. Use a free scholarship matching service like Fastweb.com or Zinch.com. Make sure that you answer all of the questions carefully so that they send you the scholarships that best fit your profile. Beware of ads on these sites, and don’t click on them.

12. Once you narrow down your college choice, look on their financial aid website for scholarships available to their students.

13. If you belong to a credit union or religious organization, check to see if they offer scholarships. Also, your place of employment may offer scholarships.
Scholarship Lists

Top Ten Most Prestigious Scholarships
1. Prudential Spirit of Community Award
2. SMART Scholarship
3. Boren Awards
4. Buick Achievers Scholarship Program
5. Coca-Cola Scholars
6. Elks National Foundation Most Valuable Student
7. Robert C. Byrd Honors Scholarship Program
8. Gates Millennium Scholars Program
9. Xerox Technical Minority Scholarship Program
10. National Merit Scholarship Corporation

Top Ten Most Unusual Scholarships
1. Common Knowledge Scholarships
2. Duck Brand Duct Tape Stuck at Prom Contest
3. Art Lit Competition
4. Writers and Illustrators of the Future Contest
5. The Ayn Rand Essay Contest
6. Scholar Athlete Milk Mustache of the Year Award
7. Tylenol Scholarship
8. Klingon Language Institute Scholarships
9. Dr. Pepper Scholarship
10. Vegetarian Resource Group Scholarships

Top Ten Scholarships That Don’t Need An A
1. US Department of Education (Federal Student Aid)
2. AXA Achievement Scholarship Program
3. Horatio Alger Association Scholarships
4. Olive Garden Pasta Tales Scholarship
5. Doodle for Google
6. Holocaust Remembrance Project Essay Contest
7. Americanism Scholarship Essay Contest
8. AFSA National Scholarship Essay Contest
9. Red Vines Drawing Contest
10. Fort Wayne Community Foundation Scholarships

Scholarships for TRiO Students
1. Indiana TRiO Scholarships
2. MAEOPP Scholarships
How Parents Can Help

- Have a frank and honest discussion with your student about your family's finances and how much college costs. This may help your student realize the importance of scholarships.

- Help with the scholarship search by encouraging your students to apply for scholarships and helping them find scholarships that match their profile.

- Stay in touch with the process and make sure your student is completing applications by the required deadline. You could set aside one night a week for your student to work on scholarships, or help them create a scholarship calendar to help them meet deadlines.

Common Scholarship Mistakes

Staying organized is important and will help you avoid these common scholarship mistakes:

- Missing deadlines
- Failing to proofread the application
- Failing to follow directions, especially regarding essay length and number of recommendations
- Omitting required information
- Applying for an award when you don’t qualify
- Failing to apply for an award for which you are eligible
- Failing to tailor the application to the sponsor
- Writing a boring essay
- Writing an essay that may offend the reviewer
- Including exaggerations or lies on your application

Beware of Scholarship Scams

Please use your best judgment when filling out scholarship applications! There are some scholarship scams out there, so please read the following guidelines so you don’t fall into their trap:

- Never pay money to get money.
- Never invest more than a postage stamp to get information about scholarships or to apply for a scholarship.
- Nobody can guarantee that you’ll win a scholarship.
- Do not give out personal information like bank account, credit card, or Social Security numbers.
- Beware of the unclaimed aid myth. The only money that goes unclaimed is money that can't be claimed.