

College Planning Guide



Essay

Writing the Essay

Assignments: Use these prompts to help jump start your writing.

Sample Assignment #1: What is something unique or special about you? ½ page

- What sets you apart from others?
- What would others say are your most impressive qualities?

Assignment #2: What are your educational goals, career plans, or career interests? Even if you have not decided on a major, you should have some idea where you are going. 1 page

- What is your passion?
- What kinds of things do you like to do?
- Why are you interested in this field?
- What have you done, if anything, to prepare yourself for this field?
- What do you expect to like about this field?

Assignment #3: Describe your community service experience and why it was important. 1 page

- What community service activities have you participated in?
- If you have listed more than one community service activity, pick one – tell about your experience.
- Who did you help? How did you help?
- Connect the experience with your own life experience.
- How did you *feel* about this experience?
- What did you learn from this experience or why was it significant?

Assignment #4: Describe obstacles you have overcome or will need to overcome in order to reach your educational goals. 1 page

- Identify and describe the obstacle.
 - How, specifically has this affected you? (Or how will it affect you?)
 - Why was this or will this be an obstacle?
 - What have you done (or will you do) to overcome this obstacle?
 - What have you learned from this or how has it helped you become who you are?
 - DO NOT SAY: "I have overcome many obstacles." Be specific.
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Essay Writing Tips

Adapted from: http://www.internationalstudent.com/essay_writing/scholarship_essay.shtml

Step One – Brainstorming

Scholarship essays vary dramatically in subject. However, most of them require a recounting of personal experience.

Expect to devote some time brainstorming ideas. To begin, consider the following:

1. What are your major accomplishments, and why are they accomplishments to you?
 2. Does any attribute, quality, or skill distinguish you from everyone else? How did you develop this attribute?
 3. What are your favorite books, movies, works of art, even role models? Have these influenced your life in a meaningful way?
 4. What was the most difficult time in your life, and why? How did your perspective on life change as a result of the difficulty?
 5. Have you ever struggled to achieve something and succeeded or failed? What made you successful or, if you failed, how did you respond?
 6. Of everything in the world, what would you most like to be doing right now? Where would you most like to be? Who, of everyone living and dead, would you most like to be with? These questions should help you realize what you love most.
 7. Have you experienced a moment when your eyes were opened to something you were previously blind to?
 8. What is your strongest personality trait?
 9. How would your friends characterize you? What would they write about if they were writing your scholarship essay for you?
 10. What have you done outside of the classroom that demonstrates qualities sought after by universities? (Sports, leadership, clubs, community service, etc.) Of these, which means the most to you?
 11. What are your goals and dreams for the future? How does this particular scholarship fit into your plans for the future?
 12. While most interested in the last 2-4 years of your life, you might consider events of your childhood that inspired the interests you have today. For instance, if you experienced extreme poverty, the death of a loved one, immigration, etc., you might want to incorporate this into your scholarship essay.
 13. If you have a role model or aspire to become like someone, you may want to incorporate a discussion of that person and the traits you admire
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Step Two - Selecting an Essay Topic

Consider the following questions before proceeding:

1. Have you selected a topic that describes something of personal importance in your life, with which you can use vivid personal experiences as supporting details?
2. Is your topic a gimmick or are you trying to make it funny? We recommend strongly that you do not do this. Usually, this is done poorly and is not appreciated by the scholarship committee unless a creative approach is explicitly recommended.
3. Will your topic only repeat information listed elsewhere on your application? Do not mention GPAs or standardized test scores in your essay if they are mentioned elsewhere.
4. Can you fully answer the question asked of you? Elaborate on all points within specified word limit.
5. Can you keep the reader's interest from the first words? The entire essay must be interesting, scholarship officers will only spend a few minutes reading each essay.
6. Will your topic turnoff a large number of people? Stay away from specific religions, political doctrines, or controversial opinions.
7. In this vein, if you are presenting a topic that is controversial, you must acknowledge counter arguments without sounding arrogant.
8. Will a scholarship officer remember your topic after a day of reading hundreds of essays? Will the officer remember you? Make a lasting impression.

After evaluating your essay topics with the above criteria and asking for the free opinions of your teachers and friends, you should have at least 1-2 interesting essay topics. Consider the following:

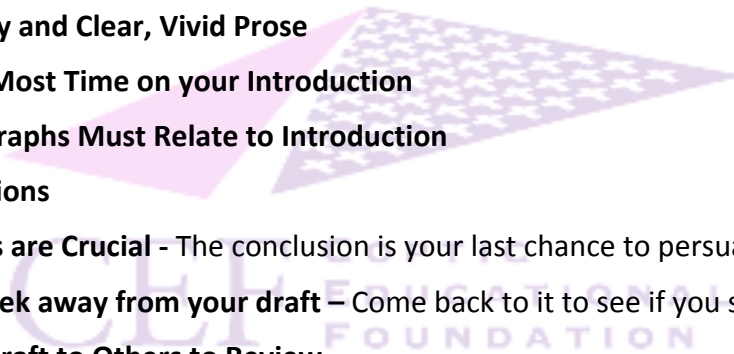
1. If you are writing an essay on how you survived or overcame a difficult situation, be careful that your main goal is to address your own personal qualities. Just because something sad or horrible happened to you does not mean that you should win a scholarship. You want to show your impressive qualities under difficult circumstances.
 2. Be careful with the word, "diversity." Many applicants are tempted to declare what makes them diverse. However, simply saying you are black or Latino or female is not enough. Address your own personal qualities and how you overcame stigma, dealt with social ostracism, as well as your motivation. Address specifically how your diversity will contribute to the realm of campus opinion, the academic environment, and the larger society.
 3. Do not mention weaknesses unless you absolutely need to. You want to make a positive first impression, and telling a scholarship officer anything about drinking, drugs, partying, etc. undermines your goal. Why admit to weakness when you can instead showcase your strengths?
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4. Be honest. Unless you are a truly excellent writer, your best, most passionate writing will be about events that actually occurred. While you might be tempted to invent hardship, it is unnecessary. Write an essay about your life that demonstrates your personality.

Step Three - Writing the Essay, Tips for Success

Even boring topics can be made into exceptional scholarship essays with an innovative approach. Keep in mind your two goals: to persuade the scholarship officer that you are worthy of receiving college assistance and to make the officer aware that you are more than a GPA and a standardized score, that you are a real-life, intriguing personality.

1. **Answer the Question**
2. **Be Original**
3. **Be Yourself**
4. **Don't "Thesaurize" your Composition**
5. **Use Imagery and Clear, Vivid Prose**
6. **Spend the Most Time on your Introduction**
7. **Body Paragraphs Must Relate to Introduction**
8. **Use Transitions**
9. **Conclusions are Crucial** - The conclusion is your last chance to persuade the reader
10. **Spend a week away from your draft** – Come back to it to see if you still feel the same
11. **Give your Draft to Others to Review**
12. **Revise, Revise, Revise**



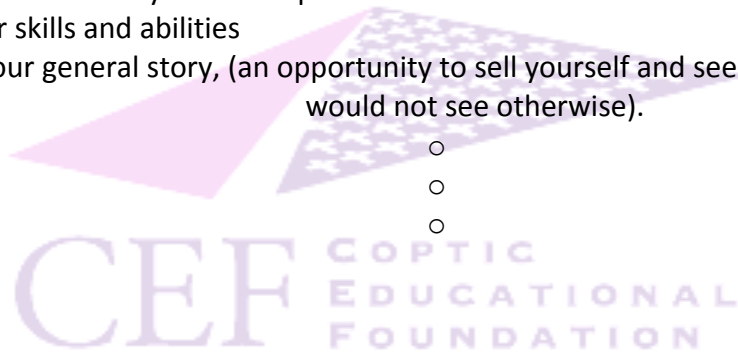
EXAMPLES OF THREE “FULL-RIDE”

Sample essays by other students who have received scholarships are included.

Gates Millennium Scholarship (any institution of higher education): Due in January.

This scholarship requires a lot of work for the applicant, nominator and the two recommenders **so you need to start early**. Please see the Gates Millennium website: www.gmsp.org

- You must be nominated for this scholarship.
- You must have two recommenders. This may take some time, so ask people who are willing to put in the time and who know you well.
- The application requires several statements such as:
 - Subjects you’ve excelled in
 - Subjects you’ve had difficulty in
 - A time you felt you or someone you know was treated unfairly
 - Your educational goals
 - Your leadership positions
 - Your community service experiences
 - Your skills and abilities
 - Your general story, (an opportunity to sell yourself and see a part of you they would not see otherwise).



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SAMPLE ESSAY

Be the change you want to see in the world” -- Mahatma Gandhi

My name is [REDACTED]. I was born in Zacatecas, Mexico, and lived there until I was six years old. My family came to the United States because my parents desired for us to have a better, richer life in the United States because surviving in Mexico was really difficult due to the high rates of unemployment. One problem my family encountered as they came to the U.S. was that we did not know how to speak English. My father had to find work and we needed a home to live in as well. We moved to an apartment that had only one bedroom and eventually, my dad found a job in the apartments where we lived. He was hired as a repairman to help people with the plumbing and electricity. My parents took night classes in English at an elementary school to improve their English. My mother stayed at home and she always reminded us to eat all of our food because we could not afford expensive food; we were not rich people.

As a young student I was placed in resource classes because my English was not very good. Becoming a better English speaker is one of my life-long goals. Even though my English is not great, I do my best to learn everything I can. Math is my weakest subject. I took Algebra in the ninth grade and I struggled in the class, but was able to start to understand the subject better. The following year I took Geometry and did very well. The next year when I started taking Algebra II, I found I was again having difficulty learning the concepts. My teacher did not think I could learn the concepts and encouraged me re-take Algebra but with the help of a tutor I was able to be successful in the class. I earned a B+ and was really proud of the result. I realize that school is difficult and it's hard to succeed if you don't ask for help or look for resources to help you better understand the materials. As a college student, I know that the classes are only going to get harder but I will not let myself fail or get discouraged. I will ask for help and work hard so that I can continue to succeed academically. Although I have struggled in Math and English I have really excelled in my Art classes. I am currently taking Advanced Art and Printmaking. My teacher, Ms. Clay, has really taken to me and continues to push me forward towards college.

My mother encourages me to go to school and is constantly reminding me of how difficult it is for minorities, including Mexicans, to live in the United States. We often talk about race and diversity and how many of us don't have an opportunity to study at a university and so I should work hard to have that chance. It is important for the students of a university to learn and understand about how other cultures value education and other things. I feel proud to know that my mother believes that I can make a difference for the family and learn things that can help the people I love and others- including undocumented individuals. I have found that it is possible to be successful if you work hard enough. I made it my goal to get good grades in all my classes.

Because of my struggles in school and experiences within my family a close and honest friend might consider me determined in my schooling, a hard-worker with compassion or kindness towards others. The reason people would call me kind is because they may feel like I had saved their lives. I always do my best to help all my friends. One example of this in my life is when one of my friends was scared to go by herself to the Xerox room to have a copy made for art class. I politely said yes to her and we both went together. Additionally, when I was in eighth grade in my math class there used to be a boy everybody that picked on. There was a time when we had to be in groups in math class to play a game related to math. Of course nobody was my partner for the game and I asked this boy to become my partner, he was proud and on the second time he asked me again to become his partner in a game.

I feel my life has been one big example of my hard work and determination. In my junior year in high school I was supposed to be on a field trip for my advanced writing class. However, I had a test in physics and stayed at school to take the test. During that class period our teacher told us that we could go to the library. I of course did have homework and suggested finishing an essay for my English class and a couple of poems for my advanced writing class. Some of my friends even have the impression that I work too hard because I spend so much time in the library on my homework and after school. The librarians also complimented me that I was a hard worker.

In addition to my efforts in school I have been involved in the Chicano/Latino Club. The club offers job opportunities for Latinos and helps people learn more about the importance of attending colleges and universities and talks about classes that I can take such as photography. I am proud to represent the Latino Community because I can make a difference to other communities and in the process, have the opportunity to educate others about the issues that affect us. All of my experiences make me a great contender for this Scholarship. I believe in giving to my community, being a leader to those around me, and achieving success in whatever I set out to accomplish.

SAMPLE ESSAY

This past school year I was in Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) and I was appointed leader of the Partnership with Business Project for state competitions. Preparing the project was a yearlong process. It has been one of the first and biggest responsibilities I have taken on. It got stressful and hard at times but I am now very proud of the outcome and realize what a great experience it was for me.

To me, this type of project was new. When they chose me, I was really excited and ready to tear the world apart and put it back together. I am glad that I started out that way because it set a high standard I wanted to meet. I wanted everything to be perfect, but I was very inexperienced. I soon found that it takes a lot of planning, time and effort.

The project consisted of scheduling, planning and setting a partnership with many local businesses. It was very much like the type of partnerships businesses have in the “real world”. Except we exchanged “goods” that were more school related. We attended a few workshops in order to prepare ourselves for a presentation in state competitions. I had the owner of a roofing company give us an entrepreneur session. A nice lady from one of our local colleges gave us a workshop on resumes, job applications and proper attire for an interview. For the last workshop, I had a few volunteers come in from our school and the University of Utah to give all the students who volunteered mock interviews.

Being juniors and in the age range of getting beginner jobs our objective was to have students, about twenty to forty, become familiar with a process that they were unfamiliar with by stepping into it. Putting the first session together was a wreck. The first workshop was the resume workshop: we had set a date we wanted it done by and everything ended up being last minute. It got done but the process was very hectic. We did not have many students show up due to lack of publicity and organization.

After the first session, the saying “You learn from your mistakes” had never been so true to me. For the next two workshops, I was much more prepared. Scheduling locations, times, and availability of our partners was much more organized and easier to put altogether. We had a lot more people show up, it was planned weeks ahead of time, and everyone knew what he or she had to do and when it had to be done. When we were through with our workshops the ride went a lot smoother because it was just preparing presentations and write-ups on our work.

I am glad I had the chance to experience such a packed project. I learned more things about myself and how I work with others, and what works best for me to get things done! I now know that I can push myself to all kinds of extremes, even though this was a small one I know I have potential of handling bigger things.

SAMPLE ESSAY

The Self-Directed Journey

I walk three blocks south of West High School and I am lost. Entering an outdoor mall I see Abercrombie and Fitch, the Gap, Hollister but where are the faithful homes labeled “this side up”, “Budweiser”, and “Fragile”? I continue down the street disoriented and unable to find the dull, dead building with endless turkey on Thanksgiving. I circle the block hoping to find the men that sell assorted balloons to over-eager adults instead I recognize the dark brown building off in the distance. Entering the building I hear children laughing. I turn to leave, then the smell bleach and destitution strikes my nostrils. I inhale deeply I am home.

I follow the laughter to my old school. My memory lapses and I cannot remember its name. Ironically, this lapse causes me to remember the school is known as the “No Name School”. I walk through the door and see active kids everywhere. . My teacher Carrie is still there zealously showing excited children about the solar system. This sight prompts me to ask “why does this school not deserve a name?” Without a proper answer I leave the building as I exit I see a sign I could not read before, it reads “The Salt Lake Homeless Shelter.” Why name the building but not the school?

Exiting I remember the mall is called “The Gateway” and I realize why the school is not named and why the building is. The latter must be named so that people walking by will know the government provides shelter for the poor, the former cannot be named because who’s name would be attached to it? A school is supposed to be a gateway but the school at the homeless shelter is not a gateway.

I think back to my time at that school and realize it never taught me what I needed to succeed. By teaching me how to add and subtract I could only calculate how much more other people had. I needed to be taught a philosophy to lead me through life, one that was not dictated by the individualistic, amoral environment of the shelter. Realizing this I chose to live in pursuit of a success defined by the realization of potential through a philosophy that emphasizes responsibility for ones actions.

My stride increases as I take the final steps back to West High School. I hear the bell ring I am late for class. When the teacher asks why I was late I do not use the excuse I was lost and confused and I almost did not find my way back, no I say “I am late because I chose to be late” She scoffs at my remark declaring “that is no excuse”; she does not know that I agree. Silently, I say to myself “Tomorrow I choose to be on time because I will not become that dilatory student. Tomorrow my name will be known.”
