

## Tips to Win Scholarships and Awards

This guide may help increase your chances of winning a scholarship or financial award! Here's some advice about what really makes an application stand out:

1) **Passion and personality.** When there are hundreds of applicants for an award the ones that show the applicant's personality and passion for the topic really stand out. Judges usually read a lot of applications (10-50 can be common!) after a while they can all meld together. It's a breath of fresh air to read one that feels like you're sitting across from the candidate--and you want to keep talking to them!

2) **Why you?** Clearly state your goals for the future: "I want to study xyz because I intend to do xyz when I graduate, so that I am able to do xyz". The applicants who know where they are headed and why are the ones who stand out from the crowd! The scholarship providers want to help students who know what they want to do.

3) **Brag a little.** A lot of young people don't realize that the things they've done with their spare time are remarkable--the uber-achievers think everyone is like them. But if you're reading this, and you're taking the time to apply for scholarships, you're probably in the "uber" category...it's OK to tell the old(er) folks reading your application how great you are. They will likely agree! If you can't brag about yourself, talk about the things other people have said about you--better yet, get reference letters that brag about you!

4) **Speaking of reference letters...** here's what really stands out:

a) A letter written specifically for the award you are applying for. Not a generic reference letter or "to whom it may concern" type letter. Those are OK for smaller awards, but anything over \$2,500 or so with multiple application elements should have a tailored reference letter...it shows you've taken the time to connect with your reference and it shows the referee thinks highly enough of you to take the time to write the letter.

b) **Letterhead**--have the letter written on official letterhead (the school, the business, etc). It's the only way judges know that it's not the applicant (or a friend or relative) who has written the reference letter. Even a generic "to whom it may concern" reference on letterhead is better than one on blank paper.

1. c) **Signature**--have the referee sign the letter..again it makes it more official.

2. d) **Confirmation**--scholarship programs have to be very careful about ensuring the integrity of their program--they don't want to take a chance that the award recipient falsified anything in their application--so be 100% sure your referees are prepared to receive a call to confirm they did indeed provide your reference. It's awful when a referee can't be reached within the time limit because that applicant will be disqualified.

5) **Look at the "cheats" for each award.** The Terms and Conditions, or Rules and Regulations (whatever the legal stuff is with each award is called) have insights into what the judges will be looking for. Sometimes there's even a marking grid (e.g. 10% on marks, 40% on volunteer work, 50% on essay..) and often there are specific statements about what they are looking for. Tailor your application exactly to those specific items! The judge will love reading an application that feeds exactly into their marking rubric!!

So here's the best reason to take a couple of hours each week to apply for some awards: free money! A \$500 award is about 50 hours of minimum wage work!!

Good luck!