

Painting your Scholarship Portrait

By Benjamin Kaplan, winner of more than \$90,000 in scholarships

What Makes A Winning Application

Unsuccessful scholarship applications, more often than not, resemble a laundry list of activities, awards, and accomplishments. Although these credentials are impressive, reading such materials feel like inhaling a random conglomeration of facts.

When reading a winning application, I feel like I am actually getting to know the person who submitted it. I feel like I understand the core interests, skills, and values of the individual.

My impression of these winning applications is reinforced when I think back to conversations I've had with contest judges at various scholarship award ceremonies. When actually meeting many of the judges whom evaluated my applications, the most frequent comment I heard was "I already feel like I know you, Ben."

Portrait of a Winner

Why do winning scholarship applications ultimately leave such strong impressions? Quite simply, these applications create vivid portraits of the applicants: Each one of these applications doesn't just recite accomplishments—it depicts the person behind the grades, extracurricular activities, and awards. After all, judges award scholarships to people, not to resumes. If a judge feels like he or she knows you, it creates a powerful emotional connection that elevates your application to more than just in the pile.

So how does one paint these self-portraits?

- ◇ First, treat each component of a scholarship application (such as the essay, extracurricular activity list and recommendation letter) as part of a unified whole—not as a separate entity. If you don't coordinate the message that each part sends, the overall impression you have is unclear and fragmented.
- ◇ Second, you must develop the message itself: the core ideas that permeate the entire application and powerfully communicate who you are. I call the cohesive message the "application theme."

Developing Your Theme

Think of the theme as the main point you are trying to communicate about yourself—the framework that puts all of your activities, interest, and credentials in the proper context. Application themes are frequently created around particular activities that you're passionate about, particular interests that fascinate you, or career goals you're striving towards.

In my experience, the typical application should have no more than one or two major themes. Any more than this and you start to dilute the communicative power of your message. If an application has two major themes, then one should be the primary theme, and the other the secondary theme. The primary theme should be the focal point of the application—the primary message you're trying to communicate. The secondary theme builds upon the message by illustrating another aspect of your life, interest, and personality.

So which activities do you most enjoy? What types of disciplines and skills come naturally to you? What do you dream of doing 20 years from now? Begin asking yourself these questions and you'll be well on your way to developing the application themes that work best for you.

Check out these websites for: Scholarship Opportunities

KSS Scholarship List

http://klahowya.ckschools.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_89572/File/Learning/Scholarships/ScholarshipList_Alpha.pdf

[TheWashBoard.org](http://www.thewashboard.org)

This is a very important scholarship search site that is run by the State of Washington. Many organizations within our state will post their scholarships on this site and nowhere else. Scholarships could be for in or out of state colleges or trade schools.

- ◇ Check these sites every week or two for updates starting in August.
- ◇ Many private scholarships are very specific in their focus and have nothing to do with GPA or income.
- ◇ With scholarships you have nothing to lose and money to gain.
- ◇ Think of scholarships as supplements.
- ◇ Keep realistic expectations, the competition is steep.
- ◇ Set a goal to apply for a MINIMUM of 20 scholarships.
- ◇ **The deadlines for most scholarships fall between September 15 and May 15.**

**Contact the Scholarship Coordinator in the Student Service Center if you have any questions.
(360) 662-4040**

Tips for Scholarship Success



Scholarship FAQ's

Who can apply for scholarships?

Anyone can apply based on the criteria of each individual scholarship. Some students assume that only those with straight A's or who are ASB Presidents get scholarships. Not so! You just need to learn to be creative in your search! Most scholarships are based on merit. That means you have a skill, talent, or ability that deserves to be recognized. Some popular categories include: Academics, Leadership, Vocation, Essay Writing, Community Service, Financial Need, Fine Arts, and Performing Arts. There are also scholarships that are granted based on your religious, ethnic or social background. Believe it or not, there are even scholarships offered to people based on height!

Who offers scholarships?

- ◇ Colleges, universities, and professional-technical institutes
- ◇ Local clubs, organizations, religious groups, unions
- ◇ Corporations and small businesses
- ◇ Professional non-profit organizations

Learn about scholarship offers on-line, on the KSS webpage at kss.cksd.wednet.edu/SSC/index.htm, or contact the KSS Scholarship Coordinator in the Student Service Center (SSC) for a copy of the scholarship list, which is updated weekly.

Are scholarships just for seniors?

Most scholarships are for seniors, however there are many that are offered to other students. Many of these are in the form of contests. The sooner you begin your scholarship search, the better your chances of success.

How do I apply?

Perhaps the most difficult scholarship application is the first one you complete. It is a good idea to photocopy the application and fill out the copy first, then transfer your information later. Type or use black ink and fill in the spaces NEATLY. Neatness does count! Follow the specific instructions carefully and meet the deadlines. A good rule of thumb is: If you are early, you are on time! Remember, the easiest way to *not* get a scholarship is to *not* apply!

When do I apply?

Each scholarship has its own deadline. While the bulk of them tend to have late winter/early spring deadlines, it is a good practice to check the scholarship bulletin provided on the SSC webpage throughout the school year.

How will I know if I got the scholarship?

Many scholarships will not notify you unless you are the winner. You have the right to phone the committee and check on where they are in the selection process. Most local committees will let you know one way or the other. Remember that while you may be highly qualified to receive a scholarship, the selection process can be very competitive. Counselors agree that it could take up to ten applications just to be considered for one scholarship. In the end-it is worth the effort!

How Scholarships are Judged

At First Glance

The judges' first evaluation of your application is a quick one—usually only 15 to 30 seconds. Even though it's quick, it's important: Most applications don't get past this first stage. To be sure yours makes it through, give your application one last review.

- ◇ Is your application complete? Check to see that you've included all the requirements.
- ◇ Is your application neat? An application with coffee stains or messy handwriting won't make the cut.
- ◇ Are all the required documents included? Be sure you're not leaving out references, transcripts, photographs, or anything else the application requires.
- ◇ Are all of the questions answered? Scan your application to see if you've left anything out.

The Second Cut

After the application makes it past the first round, the judges separate "OK" from "GREAT!" The applications that make it through are those that have thorough and well-thought-out responses.

Make sure your responses are complete and answer the question. It's very important to have your grammar and spelling correct, so check and re-check all of your essays.

The Final Decision

This is the most difficult part of the process for the judges. They've narrowed it down to a few highly qualified students. Now they must examine and compare every detail of the applications.

According to Mark Davis, President of the Coca-Cola Scholars Fund, judges pay special attention to:

Academics—a competitive GPA

Leadership—your extracurricular activities and leadership positions

Service—community service, continuous volunteer efforts

Creativity—your creative talent, they will look at the awards you have received.

Special Circumstances—any obstacles you have overcome to achieve your goals.

It's not an easy job being a scholarship judge. Unfortunately, each provider has only so much to give and must make a tough decision: Who will receive the award. By knowing what's on the minds of the scholarship judges, you'll have a better chance at being one of those winners.

Top Ten Tips for Winning Scholarship Applications

Before you submit your scholarship application, check out these tips, provided by scholarship sponsors nationwide.

Tip # 1—Apply only if you are eligible. Read all the scholarship requirements and directions carefully and make sure you're eligible before you send in your application.

Tip # 2—Complete the application in FULL. If a question doesn't apply, note that on the application. Don't just leave a blank. Be sure to supply all the additional supporting materials, such as transcripts, letters of recommendation and essays.

Tip # 3—Follow Directions. Provide everything that's required. Don't supply things that aren't requested—you could be disqualified.

Tip # 4—Neatness counts. Always Type your application, or if you must print, do so neatly and legibly. Make a couple of photocopies of all the forms before you fill them out. Use the copies as working drafts as you develop your application packet.

Tip # 5—Write an essay that makes a strong impression. The key to writing a strong essay is to be personal and specific. Include concrete details to make your experience come alive: the 'who,' 'what,' 'where,' and 'when' of your topic. The simplest experience can be monumental if you present honestly how you were affected.

Tip # 6—Watch all deadlines. To help keep yourself on track, impose your own deadline that is at least two weeks prior to the official deadline. Use the buffer time to make sure everything is ready on time. Don't rely on extensions—very few scholarship providers allow them at all.

Tip # 7—Make sure your application gets where it needs to go. Put your name (and Social Security number if applicable) on all pages of the application. Pieces of your application may get lost unless they are clearly identified.

Tip # 8—Keep a back-up file in case anything goes wrong. Before sending the application, make a copy of the entire packet. If your application goes astray, you'll be able to reproduce it quickly.

Tip # 9—Give it a final 'once-over.' Proofread the entire application carefully. Be on the lookout for misspelled words or grammatical errors. Ask a friend, teacher or parent to proofread it as well.

Tip # 10—Ask for help if you need it. If you have problems with the application, don't hesitate to call the funding organization or see your counselor.