

How to Find a Great College Scholarship

From Shah J. Chaudhry, Your Guide to College Admissions: U.S..

Introduction:

Ask yourself a few questions before starting your search for a scholarship. Initially, you should ask yourself how do you think you might qualify for a scholarship. There are different scholarships, as mentioned above, and they are suited for different aspects of the personality and for different people. How do you want to qualify for a scholarship? Will it be on the basis of merit? Or on the basis of sports? Or will it be on the basis of your artistic abilities or your pressing financial troubles? Other than these reasons, you can be a little creative and explore the different aspects of your personality. Do you belong to a particular ethnic or religious group? What do you think your major is going to be?

Once you have asked yourself these questions and fully gauged your position, next comes the step of going out and taking advantage of the various information resources that are available to you. Go visit your college counselor, check out the local library for more information, or talk to some relevant person in a community you belong to.

It is a general misconception amongst most people that scholarships are only reserved for either students who have perfect grades or outstanding test scores or for students who have pressing financial troubles and cannot afford college otherwise. As mentioned before, this is a very big misconception, in fact, 90 percent of private scholarships are not concerned with grades whatsoever, and 80 percent of these scholarships do not ask for any proof of income.

Your first step should be to fill out the FAFSA (previously mentioned, scroll up for more information). The FAFSA is easily available online or you can get it at any college office. You should send your form as soon as you can because these forms are entertained on the basis of first come, first served.

One thing to keep in mind through the whole process is that you can never apply for enough scholarships. So do not only depend on FAFSA, take full advantage of other resources available to you. The local library has directories of scholarships that can prove to be very helpful in these situations.

Preparing in Advance:

You should prepare in advance for your scholarship hunt because it maximizes your chances of getting a scholarship. There are a few things you will have to do in order to start your preparation in advance.

A lot of people believe that scholarship committees look for people who have a well rounded background. Well, if truth be told, if every had a well rounded background, college life would be kind of dull, wouldn't it? In the eyes of the scholarship committees, it is better to excel at one thing. We are not asking you to leave everything else, be well rounded and have different activities but concentrate on one single activity that you are passionate about and the activity you can take up as a hobby. Scholarship committee members can easily distinguish which activities are genuine hobbies and which have been undertaken merely for the sake of credentials.

Scholarships concentrate on diversity, therefore, it is very important that you take up a single hobby and go deeply into it. It increases your chances of getting a scholarship. Of course, you should explore a lot of different options but stick to the one thing you feel most passionately about. And remember, where scholarship committees are concerned, quality is indeed much more important than quantity.

Start practicing as early as possible for your admissions tests. Buy preparation books in advance, and sit down and study hard. These books usually have self-test papers or past papers at the end. Take those tests and see how you fare. Recognize your weaknesses and try to eliminate them. Recognize your strengths and build upon them.

There are some scholarship committees that let you apply for the same scholarship twice, for instance, once in your senior year and the second time when you are a first year graduate student. As the saying goes, if at first you don't succeed: try, try, and try again. Well, if you get rejected from these scholarships once, most of them allow you to have a look at the reviewer's comments. If they allow that, then ask for a copy of the reviewer's comments and see why you failed. The comments are usually very specific. Try to improve yourself with the help of these comments and apply again next year and chances are, you will win the scholarship.

We can now move on and tackle the difficult task of looking for scholarships on the Internet.

Finding Scholarships on the Internet:

Finding scholarships on the Internet can be a very difficult task. There is just so much information out there that sometimes you get carried away by the false promises some websites provide you with. There are so many scholarship search engines out there, it is a mind boggling task to figure out which one you should select and which one will work best for you. There are a lot of questions that will be popping up in your mind. For instance which qualities should you look for in any search engine or should you use a free search engine or a fee based one. Well, we will provide you with a few basic instructions that will assist you in finding the right search engine, and ultimately lead you to the right scholarship.

The first thing you should look for in a scholarship search engine is that it should have a sophisticated matching technology. One of the most important features in any scholarship search engine is its matching technology. It should enable you to enter all of your personal information and then match you up with a scholarship that you are suitable for. Due to this, the time you spend looking for a scholarship will be cut down and you can spend that time working on your scholarship application.

Try to avoid the search engines that only ask for a few things and do not go very much into detail about your personal information because these scholarship search engines usually return hundreds of scholarships and you have to look through them and find the ones that you are eligible to apply for. This results in wasting a lot of precious time that you cannot afford to waste. The ideal service will be very easy to use, very user friendly, and it will have thorough profile pages that will enable you to find scholarships that match your profile very closely.

Another thing to keep in mind at all times is to find a scholarship engine that provides up to date and accurate information about the scholarships available. You wouldn't want to stumble upon a scholarship that seems perfect for you and go through all of its details and then find out that it is outdated and no more available. It is very disappointing and also it can waste a lot of precious time. Find a service that offers scholarship information regarding the current academic year. An outdated service will only result in you stumbling upon broken links, out dated contact lists and discontinued programs.

You should read through the search engine's privacy policy thoroughly before providing any personal information. You need to provide scholarship search engines your personal information so they can find a scholarship match best suited for you but several websites make money out of selling this personal information to third parties so they can use it for advertising purposes. Therefore, be extremely cautious with providing your personal information and do NOT provide personal information to any scholarship search engine unless they have clearly stated privacy policies on how they intend to make use of the information. You could definitely do without your email box flooded with spam and unwanted solicitations.

The last thing, while finding the search engine that is right for you, is to make sure that this service is set up to save you as much time as possible. It should save your information so that each time you go to the search engine, you do not have to type in your personal information over and over again. It should also have necessary tools available to edit and update your profile according to the changes in your academics and achievements. A search engine that provides you all this and more will save you a lot of time and frustration and therefore, will be the ideal choice.

Making your Search Effective:

As mentioned before, the quest of finding scholarships can be a very tedious. You can, however, make your search more effective if you keep a few things in mind.

The first and foremost thing is to start your search as soon as possible. The earlier you start, the more time you will have to follow up on different scholarship leads. In addition to that, many scholarships have very early deadlines, if you start applying for scholarships in January you will end up missing more than half scholarship deadlines. Another thing is to start searching for scholarships at an early age. Though most people are unaware of it, there are many scholarships available for students in their junior year. However, students tend to start searching for scholarships in their senior year when they are getting ready to go to college.

Remember, you have nothing to lose when you are applying. Plus, you won't win unless you apply. Chances of winning a scholarship are always very low even if you are a very exceptional student, this is because a lot of students apply for scholarships each year and the competition is very tough. That is why, to increase your chances of success, apply to as many scholarships as you find yourself eligible for. It is, however, a bad idea to apply for scholarships whose criteria you do not meet. It is simply a waste of time because the scholarship committees already have more than enough students applying who are well within their requirements that they do not even bother giving a second thought to students who are not meeting their criteria. You will only be wasting your precious time which you can utilize in working hard for applying for scholarships whose criteria you do meet.

Another thing to keep in mind while searching for a scholarship is to apply to as many awards as you possibly can. You should go ahead and apply to all of the scholarship programs you are eligible for, no matter how small or insignificant the sum might seem. Every little penny helps and if you get a scholarship, it adds a line to your resume and it may even help you get more scholarships. Students do not usually apply for scholarships that offer a small amount of money and therefore, the competition is less and you have a better chance of winning these scholarships. If you win several of these, they can add up to a significantly large amount. As mentioned before, the use of up to date information is very crucial while searching for a scholarship. If you are buying a book that lists scholarship, check its copyright date to make sure that it is from the current academic year. This is because hundreds of scholarships are discontinued and several new ones pop up each year. If you are looking on the Internet, check how frequently the website is updated.

There are several scholarship scams out there. You should be very careful not to become a victim of such scams. It is not worth wasting your time with a scholarship that asks you for an application fee. When applying for a proper scholarship, you will never have to pay anymore than the cost of the postage. Scholarships that ask for money merely recirculate the money collected from the application fees amongst the selected students.

Another way to increase your odds is to apply for less competitive scholarships. Less competitive scholarships are those which are not listed in most of the scholarship books or national databases. Because these scholarships are not listed in many places, a lot of students are not aware of them and do not apply for them and therefore, they are far lesser competitive. Scholarships of this kind include scholarships offered by local religious organizations or ethnic groups, local PTA association et cetera.

Less well known institutions provide academic scholarships in order to attract talented students. Therefore, you have a great chance of getting a scholarship at a second or third tier institution. If you are going to a less well known college, you shouldn't think that you are making a compromise because the main difference between less known and well known colleges is usually the quality of students not the faculty members. It is a fact that Harvard can not employ as many PhDs as they graduate, so those people have to go some where, do they not? Chances are, even if you go to a less well known institution, you will still be under excellent faculty members.

Last but not the least, you should know the organization that is giving you a scholarship. If it is a religious organization, then naturally they will expect you to be spiritual, if it is a corporate company scholarship then you have to let them know you are interested in business. If you have to go for a scholarship interview, make sure you dress formally and arrive early. Also, it helps if you check up on the details of the company that is interviewing you.

Win a Merit Scholarship! But HOW?

The primary objective of any merit scholarship is to reward a certain talent. Typically merit scholarships tend to be awarded on the basis of academic merit or athletic or artistic merit. Sometimes financial need is also considered, but the primary objective is given much more consideration. In most of such cases, the person (or organization) who is awarding the scholarship has a certain criteria decided beforehand which they use to select the winners from the qualified applicants. In order to win merit scholarships, one of the most important things is to identify the criteria they are aiming for and then write your application with reference to the criteria.

One thing you need to realize is that different scholarships are developed for different purposes. Each scholarship has a certain goal due to which it is developed. Some colleges provide scholarships so that they can get a diversified body of students and so they provide scholarships for females or under represented ethnic or religious groups. Some scholarships are developed in the memory of someone who has passed away and the goal of such scholarships is to retain the values that were important to the person.

You should apply only for those scholarships whose criteria you meet. As mentioned before, you should not bother applying for a scholarship you are not eligible for or a scholarship whose requirements you do not meet because it is an utter waste of time. Scholarship sponsors always receive significantly more qualified applications compared to the number of awards they are offering. In the most competitive of these scholarships, the ratio is 1 in 400 and the least competitive awards tend to have a ratio of 1 in 10.

Scholarships are awarded for being excellent at something. You have to tailor your application in such a way that it draws the attention of the scholarship sponsor towards the talent that is your specialty. You also have to make sure that it is well within the criteria that the scholarship sponsor is looking for. Sometimes the criteria is clearly specified but the other times you have to analyze your application from the sponsor's point of view to judge its true quality.

Last but not the least, you should keep in mind that the scholarship sponsor is not seeing you personally and can only judge you from the quality and content of your application. So you should ensure that all the relevant detail is provided and that your application gives a perfect overview of who you are and what you stand for.

Finding Scholarships – A Brief Overview:

A few tips on how you can make your search for a scholarship effective are given in a summarize form below:

- Talk to your employer and see if there are any scholarships available that you maybe eligible for
- Fill out the FAFSA at the earliest convenience
- Talk to your parents and ask them to ask their employer about any possible scholarship that is available
- The financial aid office at your school can prove to be an excellent source of information on scholarships
- If you belong to a religious group, try contacting them with reference to your quest of looking for a scholarship
- If your parents belong to a certain organization or community group, check with them and request for a listing of scholarships they offer
- Search the Internet for information regarding scholarships suited for you