**Top Ten Tips for a Winning Scholarship Application**

**Tip #1: Apply only if you are eligible.**

Read all the scholarship requirements and directions carefully to make sure you are eligible.

**Tip #2: Complete the application in full.**

If a question doesn’t apply, note that on the application, rather than leaving it blank. Be sure to supply all required supporting documentation, such as transcripts, letters of recommendation, signed volunteer hours, essays, or whatever else.

**Tip #3: Follow directions.**

Provide everything that is required but don’t tack on extra information which was not requested. Make sure you follow ALL directions.

**Tip #4: Neatness counts**

Always type your application. Use preliminary copies as working drafts but make sure the final copy is perfect and beautiful.

**Tip #5: Watch all deadlines.**

Keep yourself on track; impose your own deadline a week or more prior to the application deadline. Use the buffer time to make sure everything is ready on time. Be aware that sometimes different elements within an application have different deadlines (e.g.: application in by this time but transcript in by that). Don’t rely on extensions; they won’t likely come.

Give references or proof readers plenty of time as well; do not try to impose an emergency on someone from whom you are requesting help and a good recommendation.

Realize that organization and timing are some of the traits the funders are judging you on to decide if they want to give you money.

**Tip #6: Make sure your application gets where it needs to go.**

Put your name (and identification number, if applicable) on ***all*** pages of the application. If you include this information - along with page numbers - on a header or footer of every page of the document, you ensure that pages won’t get separated and go missing.

**Tip #7: Keep a file.**

Get a box, a file cabinet, an accordion folder, or something similar to keep all information handy for reference. Make a new folder for every application you attempt. Keep your pin number and login name in that folder. Retain a copy of every document you send. Keep a list of what date you submitted items or requested help or asked a question. If you speak with someone at the funding institution, keep a record of the name of that person and the date on which you spoke. If your application goes astray, be able to reproduce it quickly.

**Tip #8: Write an essay that makes a strong impression.**

The strongest essays are usually personal and specific. Include concrete details to make the experience come alive and to support what you are trying to convey. If you attempt a more creative, alternative approach to the essay, make sure you have the writing skills to pull it off. If you are unsure, stick to a more direct approach. A well told and nicely developed small story can have more impact than a vague, confusing, or grandiose tale. Use varied vocabulary but do not overuse new words from a thesaurus, otherwise the writing will not sound authentic. Consider if your essay portrays the traits the funders are seeking.

Here are some good sites to consult regarding personal essay writing:

*~From the University of Toronto, on writing admission letters~*

<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/admission-letters>

*~ From Purdue University, on writing a personal statement~*

(Be sure to check out the tabs on examples, advice from Admissions officers, and Top 10 Rules and Pitfalls.)

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/>

*~ From the University of Wisconsin, on writing application essays & personal statements~*

(This site has a few nice aspects, including an on-line brainstorming exercise workbook which will email you the results for your brainstorming efforts.)

<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/apessay.html>

<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/apessay_tutorial.html>

**Tip #9: PROOF READ & EDIT!**

Do not let a single spelling error, grammatical mistake, or typo escape correction. Have a parent, friend, or teacher also proofread it. A fresh pair of eyes sometimes catches something the writer can’t see. Save drafts as you go, come back again and again to improve your writing. Rare is the soul who writes well enough to win a scholarship with a first draft.

**Tip # 10: Ask for clarification if you need it.**

If you have problems with the application or don’t understand, call the funding organization to clarify. Compose a clear question before you call and speak clearly, politely, and confidently on the phone. Each contact you have represents you.

**Bonus Tip #11: Reflect the required qualities in your application.**

For example, if this is a leadership scholarship, then make sure you have supplied examples of actual leadership, rather than just participation. Is it a community service scholarship? Make sure you show the ways you have served your community, rather than just touting your personal achievements. And so on. Keep referring to the requirements of the funding agency, their stated goal, and the intent of the scholarship. Highlight whatever you have got that meets that criteria. When you are done, re-read the criteria and then re-read your essay. Do they correlate?

Reflect on the meaning of your activities and how that relates to the qualities the funder is seeking. Do not simply list your achievements but explain what they have taught you and how they have changed you and how they have built in you the qualities the funder seeks.