

CREATING AN EFFECTIVE SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION

AAUW Hilo Branch

Goal: To make you, the scholarship applicant, aware of what scholarship donors are looking for in the AAUW Scholarship application so that you may tailor your efforts more effectively, especially with regard to your Personal Statement and choice of References.

A. FIRST IMPRESSION—MAKE IT COUNT

1. Neatness, or lack thereof, gives an impression. Make sure the application is filled out correctly and legibly.
2. The application must be complete. Read through the instruction sheet, especially the required components of the application (the application form, transcripts and references). Make a check list with deadlines and follow it.
3. Answer every question. If you are not answering an item, write NA (not applicable) in the blank so the donor knows that you did not just miss it. Incomplete forms can be a reason to disqualify the application without even reading it.
4. Deadlines are not flexible. Be sure you understand the deadlines for the components of the application and meet them.

B. PERSONAL STATEMENT

1. Think of this as an opportunity to sell yourself. Why should you be picked over anyone else? The questions on the form only give the reviewer a very general idea of your situation. This is your chance to shine; to create a picture of who you are.
2. This is also a chance to explain challenges you have had or currently have, whether they are financial, physical, or personal. What are you doing to work with them or resolve them? On the other hand, do not whine. Explain and move on to your strengths, hopes, and dreams.
3. What are your academic and career goals? Why did you choose your major or career? Did some life experience influence your choice? What makes you excited or passionate about your chosen path? Are you even on a path, or just wandering around? You are more likely to get support for reality-based, goal-directed effort; not pie in the sky dreams unlikely to be achieved.

4. Grammar, spelling, and punctuation count. Proofread when you are done and use your computer's resources (spellcheck, grammar check, thesaurus). Then have someone with writing skills you admire proofread your personal statement.

C. REFERENCES

1. Allow enough time for your reference to fulfill your request. You are asking your reference to do you a favor, so do not drop it on them the day before the deadline. No matter how sympathetic they are, there is likely to be a little resentment that you are asking them to drop everything to help you. On the other hand, if you give them 2-3 weeks lead time, be sure to check on the status a week before the deadline. Your reference may appreciate/need the reminder.

2. Choose wisely. Choose a professor who knows you and your goals, not just one from whom you have received good grades. You may also want to consider whether that professor is a good writer. You want their reference to tell your story and to shine on your behalf. You do not want it to be stiff, formal, or awkward.

3. Is your reference relevant? Opinions of professors or people you worked with in your field will carry more weight than family friends or your family doctor. Your chosen reference needs to be able to offer an opinion on your likelihood to achieve your academic goals. Even if you were a shining star in dance class, if you are majoring in computer science, your dance teacher may not be your best choice.

4. If none of your major professors know you well enough to write a meaningful recommendation, this is your chance to change that. Even outside of this need, you never know when their remembering you as more than a number in their grade book will work to your advantage. Make an appointment to see him or her to talk with them about your goals and what you do outside of class (jobs, classes, affiliations and community involvement). Then ask if they will write you a recommendation for a scholarship. Be sure you have the form and envelope with you.

D. LOOKING FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

1. Check the Financial Aid Office website. Make an appointment with one of the financial aid counselors who are trained to help you find appropriate funding.

2. Search the internet based on your major, career, ethnicity, and gender. The more specialized the scholarship, the less competition!