

Writing a Cover Letter/Personal Essay for a Scholarship

A scholarship letter is written to claim the nomination for scholarship program by providing all academic details to prove eligibility. Scholarship format varies as per institutions. These letters are written in an instructed format. They are invited by institutions, submitted by students and consequently, a scholarship is allotted on basis of eligibility of a candidate. Usually more than not, this letter is submitted with appropriate qualification certificates and a CV. Capable students are also referred by the letter of reference to support their nominations. The standard length of the document equals to one page of single spaced writing or slightly over one page of 1,5 spaced writing.

A Few Hints

1. *Use your resume as the database for the cover letter or essay.* If you cannot include your resume with the cover letter or essay, as in most scholarship applications, you will need to include all information from your resume in the letter.
2. *Always address your letter/essay to a specific person using “Dear Mr/Ms/Miss” and the name of the person, avoid using “Dear Sir or Madam” or “To Whom It May Concern”*
3. *Divide the material into specific areas, just as you would in a resume.* These almost always include education, scholarships and awards, work experience and goals. Other categories you may or may not qualify for such as volunteer work, research projects, conference papers or presentations, independent study projects, affiliations, language and skills.
4. *You will need to include a clear statement at the beginning in order to indicate the key categories that make you a good candidate.*
5. *Introduce each section with a clear topic sentence, indicating which area you plan to discuss.* They should contain key words to help direct the reader.
 - I have always chosen challenging courses, and have an excellent/ very good/ good *academic record*.
 - My academic achievement is demonstrated by the *numerous scholarships* I have received both at the high school and university level.
 - I have developed strong leadership skills, and know how to interact with a wide variety of other people while *working* several different jobs...
 - I have done a fair amount of *community service* including...

- *My independent research projects* have strengthened my skills in laboratory work and developed in me an eye for details.
 - *Tutoring* has taught me to work diplomatically and successfully with a wide variety of students.
 - *Travel* has played a large role in shaping my view of others and of cultural differences.
6. *Your discussions should be result oriented.* For instance: As a result of working at a bank as part of your studies in finance and economy, you value accuracy, efficiency and understand job responsibility.
7. *You should stress the qualities and areas of expertise that make you good candidate for the scholarship.* To do this, refer to the qualifications listed with the scholarship. So, for example, if the committee considers financial need when deciding upon the candidates, make a point of your financial need but not in a tacky way. Committees often look for such things in a candidate as well:
- Knowledge of chosen field, carefulness of work
 - Motivation, enthusiasm, seriousness of purpose
 - Creativity, originality, ingenuity of problem solving
 - Ability to plan and carry out research, organization
 - Ability to express thought in speech and writing
 - Maturity, emotional stability, ability to withstand stress and face challenges
 - Leadership skills
 - Self-reliance, initiative, independence, adaptability
 - Responsibility
 - Ability to work well with others
 - Growth potential, desire to achieve, dedication to goals
8. *It may be desirable to conclude using a sentence that wraps the letter up and summarizes key strengths.*
9. *Choice of words is important.* Achieve a balance between bragging and modesty. Avoid exaggerations and clichés but do not down play your worth. A list of active word is included, as well.
10. *Proofread your letter/essay.* Consider grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Avoid wordiness. Be clear and concise.
11. *Format the letter as a letter.* That means addresses and the date at the top, a greeting (Dear Mrs. Wolf,) a closer (Sincerely,) and a signature above your name in print.

12. *Format the essay as an essay.* If they've asked for an essay, do not submit a letter.

* More often than not, scholarships only require either a cover letter or personal essay. If only one is required, the body of text and guidelines remain the same but the format is done accordingly. If both are required, think of the cover letter as a small, tight introduction to the personal essay. If a cover letter, personal essay, and resume are required then the cover letter introduces you, the purpose for sending the packet of stuff you're sending, and gives a brief overview of what to expect in the resume. The personal essay becomes an expansion of the resume as well as a source of information on those things we can't glean from the resume or cover letter.

** *Adapted from "Writing a Cover Letter for a Scholarship." Maureen Thum, English Department Lecturer, University of Michigan-Flint.*

Tips: What to Do with a Scholarship Application Essay*

1. *Answer the Question.* Review the question asked by the application. Have you completely answered it? If not, what additional info needs to be included? How can it be effectively inserted into the text?
2. *Be Original.* Is the essay individual and creative?
3. *Use Transitions.* Applicants continue to ignore transitioning to their own detriment. Use transitions within paragraphs and especially between paragraphs to preserve the logical flow of the essay. Transitions are not limited to phrases like "as a result, in addition, while, since, etc." but includes repeating key words and progressing the idea. Transitions provide the intellectual architecture to argument building.
4. *Conclude with a bang.* The conclusion is the last chance to persuade or impress the reader. In the conclusion, avoid summary since the essay is usually short to begin with; the reader should not need to be reminded of what was written 300 words before. Also, do not use stock phrases like "in conclusion, in summary, to conclude, etc."

Sample Cover Letter Format presented in an exaggerated length to illustrate a variety of language available:

Fran Fingers
1234 Any Street
Anywhere, Anystate 12345
(123) 867-5309

October 5, XXXX

Bonnie Blum Memorial Scholarship Selection Committee
5678 Any Street
Anyhwere, Anystate 12345

Members of the Selection Committee:

Opening: Houses the reason for the letter, the specifics of your application, umbrella statement for rest of letter.

First Paragraph: Topic Sentence, discussion of one of areas mentioned earlier (education for example) briefly or in depth depending on accompaniment of personal essay and/or resume.

Second Paragraph: Transition, topics sentence, discussion of new point.

Third Paragraph: See second.

Fourth Paragraph: See third. Eventually you will run out of new points to discuss. You will then make the transition into a closing paragraph.

Closing: Often times it's easy to transition from your goals to a summation of the letter. Do not use the same wording as the opener. Thank the committee for considering your letter.

Sincerely,

Signature

Fran Fingers

Adapted from "Guidelines for Cover Letter." CDC, U of M - Flint

Sample Essay/Cover Letter 1

I am applying for the Ralph M. and Emmalyn E. Freeman Honors Scholar Program Scholarship. Presently, I am a junior in the nursing program. I believe my chosen profession will enable me to fulfill all of my desires to help others, to continuously expand my knowledge base and skills and to travel the world. Throughout my life I have participated in extracurricular activities including valuable volunteer experiences. I have striven for academic excellence, always wishing to make the most of my education. In addition, I have managed to work to provide for some of the basic expenses that students have. Next year this will especially important, as I will no longer be receiving the Chancellor Scholarship.

Education has always been an important aspect of my life. While in high school I managed to take challenging courses such as advanced placement English and calculus, physics, and chemistry. I enjoyed the arts and was involved in art, band, and choir. Despite the time consuming practices , I was able to maintain an excellent study results.

I decided to study to come to the University of Michigan-Flint because of the smaller class size, scholarship monies and the University's Honor Program.

I have received many scholarships since I began my college career. In 1998 I received the Chancellor's Scholarship providing me with \$1,700 per year for four years. I also received three scholarships from my graduating high school. The first was the Goodrich Alumni Scholarship totaling \$200. The second was the Goodrich Teachers Scholarship totaling \$500. The last was from the National Honor Society and totaled \$260. All of these awards were given based on scholarship and community service. Because of my acceptance in the University's Honor Program I also receive the Honor's Scholarship. Despite the challenges of both the nursing and honors curriculum I have managed to maintain a 3.7 grade point average. My efforts did not go unnoticed and in 2001 I received two additional scholarships including the Ralph M. and Emmalyn E. Freeman Honors Scholar Program Scholarship and the Ralph M. And Emmalyn E. Freeman Long Distance Learning Scholarship.

These accomplishments lead me to believe that in the future I will continue to perform at a high level.

Although education plays a significant role in my life, I am involved with many other activities. During high school I was an active member of the National Honor Society for two and a half years. My last year as a member gave me the opportunity to play a more active role as I participated as NHS treasurer. I frequently tutored individuals by offering my time before and after school for high school students. I enjoy helping others with schoolwork and have continued to aid fellow students at the college level. I also enjoy the arts and participated in many performances, plays, musicals and exhibitions, often requiring traveling to other areas and interacting with new individuals.

Currently I am involved with fellow nursing students on a class and university level. I belong to the National Student Nurses Association as well. I have volunteered my time to inform individuals of various ages of what nursing involves and share the need for nurses. IN addition, I have entered the community to perform blood pressure screening and offer information to those at risk for hypertension and diabetes. I have increased my knowledge base as well as my public presentation skills by presenting one of my papers, Beatrice and Katharine: Shakespeare's Unconventional Women at the Purdue University-Calumet Undergraduate Research Conference in 1999. Through all of these experiences I have learned to act as a leader, work in groups, and organize my time appropriately.

In addition to school related activities I am also involved with my local church. I teach a class of 3-6 year old kids. When other teachers are unable to teach Sunday school I do not hesitate to come to their aid. I have participated in church cleanup, nursery duty and choir as well. I feel that by aiding in church related activities I am setting a positive example for the children within the church to follow.

Work is also a part of my life. Until recently, I would work 16-20 hours/week to provide for educational expenses. Presently I work 8 hours/week in the neonatal intensive care unit at Hurley Medical Center. I enjoy working because I am able to see newborns progress to a state where they can finally be discharged to their families. I enjoy teaching parents about their infants such as what to expect, what is normal for their infant to do and when to call the doctor. During the summer of 2001 I worked in a group of three other individuals to perform a quality improvement project on gavage fed infants and then presented the results to our peers.

Through my work experiences I have learned a little more about what to expect upon completion of the nursing program and now know the reality of what to expect as a registered nurse. Seeing problems such as mandatory overtime and poor benefits despite a nursing shortage has motivated me to remain active in associations such as the Student Nursing Association because I realize that as a group we will be able to voice our concerns about the issues that nurses face today.

My goal is to become a registered nurse so that I can perform task that clients cannot do for themselves as well as be an active listener, patient advocate and educator. At some point I would enjoy going back to school to become a practitioner. I have had an extraordinary number of nursing instructors who were absolutely wonderful and would one day like to give back what they have given to me by becoming an instructor. I know that one day I will provide something meaningful to the individuals that I encounter.

Mistakes Made on Scholarship Applications

By Laura DiFiore

1. Forget to include your name and/or address! You would be surprised how many students do not include their name or address on an application!
2. Submit an incomplete application. Make sure you include all required references, photos, transcripts, and essays.
3. Apply when you do not meet their minimum requirements.
4. Submit inappropriate supporting documentation.
5. Spelling errors - even one spelling error can doom your application. Take enough time to spell-check and edit your application.

Action Words*

Accelerated	Decentralized	Headed	Participated	Settled
Accomplished	Decreased	Helped	Performed	Shaped
Achieved	Defined	Hired	Pinpointed	Showed
Acquired	Delegated	Identified	Pioneered	Simplified
Activated	Delivered	Implemented	Planned	Sold
Adapted	Demonstrated	Improved	Prepared	Solved
Addressed	Designed	Improvised	Presented	Sorted
Administrated	Determined	Influenced	Processed	Sponsored
Advised	Developed	Initiated	Procured	Staffed
Allocated	Devised	Inspected	Produced	Standardized
Analyzed	Directed	Installed	Projected	Stimulated
Anticipated	Discharged	Inspired	Programmed	Started
Applied	Discovered	Instigated	Promoted	Streamlined
Appointed	Documented	Instituted	Proposed	Strengthened
Appraised	Distributed	Integrated	Provided	Stretched

Approved	Doubled	Instructed	Proved	Structured
Arranged	Earned	Interpreted	Published	Studied
Assessed	Edited	Interviewed	Purchased	Suggested
Assisted	Effected	Introduced	Realized	Summarized
Assigned	Eliminated	Invented	Recommended	Supervised
Attained	Employed	Invested	Reconciled	Supported
Audited	Enforced	Investigated	Recruited	Surpassed
Augmented	Engineered	Launched	Redesigned	Surveyed
Averted	Established	Lectured	Reduced	Sustained
Avoided	Estimated	Led	Re established	Tailored
Broadened	Evaluated	Lightened	Regulated	Taught
Built	Examined	Liquidated	Reinforced	Terminated
Calculated	Exceeded	Located	Rejected	Tested
Centralized	Executed	Made	Relate	Tightened
Clarified	Exercised	Maintained	Re negotiated	Traded
Collaborated	Expanded	Managed	Reorganized	Trained
Combined	Expedited	Marketed	Reported	Transacted
Completed	Extended	Mediated	Represented	Transferred
Composed	Extracted	Minimized	Researched	Transformed
Conceived	Facilitated	Mobilized	Reshaped	Translated
Concluded	Financed	Modernized	Resolved	Trimmed
Condensed	Forecast	Modified	Restored	Tripled
Conducted	Formed	Monitored	Revamped	Uncovered
Consolidated	Formulated	Motivated	Reviewed	Undertook
Constructed	Found	Negotiated	Revised	Unified
Contributed	Founded	Obtained	Revitalized	Used
Controlled	Framed	Operated	Revived	Utilized
Converted	Fulfilled	Ordered	Saved	Verified
Corrected	Generated	Organized	Scheduled	Vitalized
Created	Guided	Originated	Secured	Widened
Cultivated	Handled	Overcame	Selected	Won
		Oversaw	Set up	Wrote

*Compiled by Cooperative Education and Career Center, U of M – Flint

Adapted from <http://www.umflint.edu/writingcenter>