



Student Loan Tips

Tips for Completing Your Scholarship Application and Essay

Quick answer: To submit a stronger scholarship application, start early, read every requirement carefully, tailor your essay to each prompt, request recommendation letters well in advance, use AI tools only to support (not replace) your own writing, and proofread before you submit.

By **Lisa Kaplan** / Aug 5th, 2026

4 min read

While every scholarship has different requirements, these best practices are recommended by colleges, scholarship providers, and financial aid professionals.

Start Early

Many scholarships have annual deadlines that fall months before the academic year begins. Starting your search and application early gives you more time to gather transcripts, request recommendation letters, write essays, and complete applications without feeling rushed.

Read Every Requirement Before You Apply

Review the eligibility criteria and application instructions carefully. Make sure you meet all qualifications, provide every required document, and answer every question — incomplete applications may not be considered.

Fill Out Every Field on Scholarship Search Profiles

Many scholarship search tools let you list optional details — hobbies, interests, ethnicity, religion, family background, career goals — as searchable keywords. Skipping these fields isn't just leaving information blank; it can mean the tool never matches you to niche scholarships you'd otherwise qualify for. See our [How to Find College Scholarships](#) guide for more on building out a search profile.

Tailor Each Essay to the Prompt

Avoid submitting the exact same essay for every scholarship. Instead, adjust your essay to answer the prompt directly while highlighting experiences, achievements, goals, or community involvement relevant to that specific opportunity. A personalized essay shows you've taken the time to understand what the scholarship is really asking. If you need help getting started, [Purdue University's Online Writing Lab \(OWL\)](#) offers free guides on brainstorming, organizing, revising, and proofreading essays.

Ask for Recommendation Letters Early

Many scholarships require one or more letters of recommendation. Give teachers, counselors, professors, employers, or mentors several weeks' notice whenever possible, and share

information about the scholarship and your accomplishments so they can write a stronger letter.

How Should You Use AI When Writing a Scholarship Essay?

AI tools can be a legitimate part of your process — but only for certain tasks.

Do consider using AI for:

- Brainstorming essay topics or generating questions to help you think through your experiences
- Building an outline or structure before you write
- Checking grammar, spelling, and clarity after you've written your own draft
- Researching application requirements, deadlines, or scholarship details

Don't use AI to:

- Copy and paste AI-generated content into your application or essay
- Let AI replace your own voice, tone, or personal stories
- Checking grammar, spelling, and clarity after you've written your own draft
- Researching application requirements, deadlines, or scholarship details

For more on using AI to help build your application, see this resource from [JRA Educational Consulting](#). It focuses on the college essay, but the same principles apply to scholarship essays.

Proofread Everything Before You Submit

- Check spelling and grammar.
- Verify names and dates.
- Make sure all required documents are attached.
- Ask a trusted teacher, family member, or mentor to review your application if possible.

A polished application reflects attention to detail.

Key Takeaways

- Start early so you have time to gather documents, request letters, and write thoughtfully.
- Fill out every optional field on scholarship search profiles — skipping niche details can mean missing matches.
- Tailor every essay to its specific prompt — never reuse the same essay word-for-word.
- AI to brainstorm, outline, or proofread, never to write your final essay for you.
- Proofread and have someone else review your application before you submit.