

# Tips for Scholarship Essays

International Academic Programs  
University of Wisconsin - Madison

*Many scholarship applications now require an essay of some sort. This is for a number of reasons, most importantly, the selection committee wants to get to know the applicant. It's far easier for them to award you the scholarship if they feel like they know you. Selection committees also want to make sure that you can competently express your ideas in writing. Even if you're at the top of your class and volunteer in every organization in town, you won't get the top prize if you can't put your thoughts on paper.*

*Writing scholarship essays for study abroad doesn't have to be much different than writing other scholarship essays. You'll want to follow the same steps and stick to the same goals, but your focus may be a bit different. These pages contain suggestions to help you get started but the best Be sure to refer to other resources in your quest for the winning essay.*

**Read Directions.** The type of essay can vary widely, from a personal statement to a project proposal, but selection committees are looking for some of the same things. Be sure to read the essay directions carefully, as some committees might outline in detail what they are looking for in the essay. Additionally, if the directions need clarification, contact the administrator directly.

**Be Unique.** Many students will have similar backgrounds as you which means sticking out in a crowd is paramount, and the essay requirement is the perfect opportunity to do so. It's your chance to show the scholarship selection committee how great you really are, tell them a unique story of personal perseverance, or describe your limitless potential and unmatched determination.

**Tell Your Story.** Everyone has a story to tell. Your essay can take many forms, from a personal narrative of your past accomplishments to a careful analysis of a quote, favorite author, public policy or important global trend. Whichever form you choose (or the directions require) your goal is to show that you are more thoughtful, creative and dedicated than anyone else. As long as your story answers the essay question the sky's the limit.

**Be Memorable.** You can do this in two great ways; by being original and by being descriptive. Not only will this perk interest in your story, but it will help make your essay memorable. If you have a unique personal background, tell that. But remember, just because you have a special story or diverse family history doesn't mean you're scholarship worthy. When writing your story be as descriptive and detailed as you can. Don't just tell the selection committee that you are interested in alleviating poverty; tell them that you're so dedicated you've started a fund drive for a local charity.

**Show Initiative.** The best way to do this is to contact the scholarship funder or administrator directly. Find out the goals and purpose of the sponsor organization. This will help you keep your essay on topic and relevant. Then, figure out a way to relate your interests to the organization's goals. Many times these are the most creative essays. Maybe your desire to be an international aid worker includes upgrading access to technology in rural areas. Perhaps your proposed career in international business will put you in close contact with environmental issues in urban areas. You can always find a way to relate your interests to the essay's topic.

**Be Yourself.** Finally, be sure your essay accurately depicts who you are and what you care about. Don't write what you think the selection committee wants to hear.

## Here are some steps to help you get started

### 1) **Contact the funder directly.**

*The best source of information about the scholarship is the funding organization or person. Contacting the funder gets your questions answer fast and whether it's the Federal Government or a local non-profit, it shows the them that you're serious about writing an effective essay. The best advice and the most up-to-date information may be just a phone call away.*

### 2) **Read directions carefully.**

*Don't go over word or page limits. Ask yourself some basic questions. Who will be reading my essay? What's the mission of the sponsor organization? What is the question asking? How many pages do I have to get my message across?*

### 3) **Brainstorm.**

*What topic(s) am I most interested in writing about? What stories or examples from my life best relate to the topic? What academic classes keep me interested? What are my hobbies? What would I do if I had limitless time and means?*

### 4) **Write.**

*Put pen to paper or open up your favorite word processor. Whatever you chose as your topic can be your starting point. Write an outline or just start typing. Don't worry about grammar or punctuation at this stage, your goal is to get the juices flowing and develop the infrastructure of your essay.*

### 5) **Rewrite.**

*Take a break. Walk away from your writing for a few hours or a day and come back with a fresh set of eyes. You'll be surprised at how much improvement you'll see the second time around. Repeat this step until you feel comfortable with the final draft.*

### 6) **Proofread.**

*Do not skip this step. It is the most important. Read it out loud. If your essay contains run-on sentences, has lapses in logic, or is rife with bad punctuation you lose credibility instantly. The good news is that you can catch those mistakes by proofreading. You can even feel more comfortable if you have a friend, TA, or professional colleague read it for errors.*

## Additional Resources

The Writing Center

Department of English  
6171 Helen C. White Hall  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
600 North Park St.  
Madison, WI 53706

(608) 263.1992

[www.writing.wisc.edu](http://www.writing.wisc.edu)

Email: [wcenter@writing.wisc.edu](mailto:wcenter@writing.wisc.edu)

International Academic Programs

Study Abroad Resource Center  
301 Red Gym  
University of Wisconsin - Madison  
716 Langdon  
Madison, WI 53706

(608) 265.6329

[www.studyabroad.wisc.edu](http://www.studyabroad.wisc.edu)

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