Scholarship Applications

Scholarships help cover the cost of attending a university and completing a degree. Scholarship applications are competitive, so you need to write to the best of your ability. This handout presents general tips for completing scholarship applications, but always tailor your work for each individual scholarship. For additional help with scholarship applications, visit the Writing Center.

Finding Scholarships and Preparing to Apply

- ☐ *Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA):* Scholarships based on financial need may require FAFSA, so complete FAFSA before completing scholarship applications.
- ☐ *Find scholarships:* Universities, the government, and private entities all offer scholarships. Meet with a school counselor or advisor to explore scholarship options. University fellowships or assistantships may also provide funding.
- ☐ *Check the validity of scholarships:* Scholarships that ask you to pay a fee, lack eligibility requirements, or seem too good to be true may turn out to be a scam.
- ☐ *Ask for a letter of recommendation:* If a letter of recommendation is required, ask an instructor or employer who can write about your best traits and notable accomplishments. Let them know how and when to submit their recommendation and give them plenty of time to do so. Set the due date for the letters about a week before you turn in your scholarship application.

Completing Essays and Applications

- ☐ *Gather your ideas:* Outline and keep a list of what experiences or personal traits make you a strong and unique applicant. Note how you intend to spend funds and acknowledge the donor.
- ☐ *Follow all requirements:* Provide all materials requested for each scholarship (i.e., an essay, resume, transcript, or letter of recommendation). Make sure to closely follow any writing prompts, format requirements, character or wordcounts, and due dates.
- ☐ *Understand your audience:* Consider the purpose and source of each scholarship, and write in a respectful way that establishes common ground, highlights shared values, and engages readers.
- ☐ *Make it personal:* Focus on your experiences, qualities, motivations, and goals. Show, don't tell.
- ☐ *Reuse your work:* When appropriate, instead of writing new content for each application, you can alter previous essays to meet the new application requirements.
- ☐ *Double-check your work:* Review your application. Read essays aloud, get feedback from others, visit the Writing Center, and run spellcheck. This will help you eliminate irrelevant or inappropriate ideas, spot errors, and ensure your work is polished and ready to submit.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- ☐ *Tone:* Try not to be overly formal or casual in your writing.
- ☐ *Listing Achievements:* Explain what you've learned, not just what you have done.
- ☐ *Vague or Generic Answers:* You want your application to be memorable, so highlight attributes, experiences, and insights that set you apart from other applicants.