California University of Pennsylvania Honors Program

How to Write a Statement of Purpose for a Scholarship or Fellowship

When applying for a scholarship or fellowship, you will often need to write an essay or statement of purpose to convince a reading committee why you are the right person to receive this award. The actual question or prompt will vary from one scholarship to another, but with each one, you are trying to get your reader to understand your perspective and how this specific scholarship will help you achieve your goals.

First, make sure that you've read any and all details regarding the scholarship. These details and guidelines help you understand what exactly the committee is looking for in an application. For instance, if the scholarship is asking about your extracurricular activities, don’t spend your whole essay talking about why *Huckleberry Finn* is your favorite book. Instead, write about how you learned to be a team player or how to balance schoolwork with other commitments.

So, after reading the guidelines, your second step is to begin brainstorming topics that you could write about. Think back on specific experiences and pick the one that you are the most passionate about. Could it be turned into an effective essay? A great way to get a point across is to tell a quick story and then to draw conclusions as to why it is important or how it has impacted you.

One thing to keep in mind is the large number of scholarship essays that committees have to read through. So, when writing and revising, remember that you want your essay to stand out. Start off with a good hook—an interesting anecdote or odd idea—and build your essay from there. But keep the reader's interest; don't let that initial idea fizzle out. Also, consider that this may be your only chance to communicate your personality to the reader, so make it count. Often, *how* you say something is just as important as *what* you say. So, be passionate and be honest.

Some general tips:
- Make sure you follow any rules provided (regarding such things as length, font, and format). If there are no rules, just be consistent and use common sense.
- Scholarship essays can take several forms, such as a letter or a memo. Follow the prompt guidelines for information on how to format the essay and who to address it to. If there is no such information provided, then keep it simple.
- Stories are great, but don't get bogged down in telling yours. Remember: the ultimate goal of a story or anecdote is to prove a larger point or to highlight your credentials. Make sure there is a larger point.
- Try to avoid the five-paragraph essay. It often sounds unnatural and stilted. You want to develop an argument as to why you think you deserve this scholarship, but let that argument develop naturally. Let each point build off the last.
- Give yourself enough time to complete your essay. Writing works best as a process, and you should go through several drafts before you decide you're finished.
- Get someone (or several people) to read over your essay and give feedback. This can be a friend or family member or a consultant at the writing center. This can help you to figure out which parts are working and which aren't.
- End by thanking the reader for taking the time to consider you.