

Scholarship Guide

Master the Basics

Where to start

- **Go online** and take advantage of free scholarship searches such as www.fastweb.com for local, regional, state, and national awards.
- **Consult** your school guidance counselor about local, private and corporate sponsorships.
- **Search** your community. There are many philanthropic and non-profit organizations that may offer awards. Visit your local public library to research scholarships.

How to prepare

- **Get organized** and keep the scholarships you are working on separate from those you have not started. Use a calendar to keep track of dates and deadlines. Create a folder for each application and materials.
- **Know your time frame to apply.** Complete and submit the easiest scholarships first. Then focus on the scholarships with earlier deadlines and ones that may require more time. Allow plenty of time when requesting letters of recommendation.

Submit your application

- **Remember** to check spelling and grammar.
- **Proofread your materials** and have a teacher, parent or friend read over your application and essay if submitting online or by mail. They can provide feedback and catch mistakes.
- **Keep a copy** of your application.

The Scholarship Essay

Before you begin:

Develop a theme that fits the scholarship. Learn about the scholarship provider's mission and goals. Include elements in your essay to complement the sponsor's expectations. For example, if the provider is interested in community service, highlight ways you impact your community within your essay.

A few topic ideas:

Personal achievements

- Talk about specific interactions you may have had with others. Do you still keep in touch with anyone you've helped? How did you influence their lives?
- How did your achievements reflect your values? Why are your achievements important to you? Did you do something that received high praise or recognition?
- Personalize your experience. For example, what makes the volunteer and community service you've performed unique? What made you stand out?

fastweb! Tip: Judges want to see how your achievements impact you personally! They are interested in what you have learned from your successes and challenges.

Academic plans and possible major

- Instead of saying, "Science is my favorite subject," discuss a *specific* assignment or project that you worked on that sparked your interest.
- Avoid saying that you selected a major or career path to "help people." What specific actions can you take to improve the lives of others? Discuss how your values are relevant to what you will be studying in college.

fastweb! Tip: Don't focus on the classes you hope to take in college. Focus on your academic degree and future goals and why they are important to you.

Social issues and current events

- Think about current issues or events in the news that you feel strongly about.
- Do you know a lot about a controversial topic?
- Do you know of someone who is directly involved in an issue who might be able to provide insight?

fastweb! Tip: Summarize the issue(s) briefly. Share your perspective, offer constructive suggestions and address all sides of the issue, not just your own opinion.

Mentors, admirers and influences

- Think about your friends and family, community and the things you've learned outside of the classroom. Pick specific people, incidents and learning experiences to write about that will let your personality come through.
- Is there a person you aspire to be like within your chosen major or career path? Someone who encouraged you to succeed?
- Focus on specific qualities or actions that the person has inspired in you.

fastweb! Tip: When writing about others, be sure to focus on how this person has inspired you and shaped your life.

What Do Judges or Evaluators Look For?

Do you qualify? Every year, students waste time by applying for awards they aren't eligible to win. If you don't meet the eligibility criteria, don't enter!

Is your application presented well? Type your essay, place the application, essay and other contents in a large folder for mailing. Do not fold any of the materials.

Did you include all required documents? Make sure you include all required academic transcripts, references and letters of recommendation.

Did you answer all of the questions? Double-check that you haven't forgotten any required information.

College Choice Guide

College Research Tips

- **Consult your school counselor.** Your school's guidance office can assist you with information on college preparation, career options and making your final school decision.
- **Visit the colleges and universities' web sites.** This will allow you to learn more about the school's location, size, admission and financial aid information.
- **Go to your local library.** You can find college books and college guides that offer detailed school profiles, programs offered, tuition costs, campus culture and more. Just be sure you are looking at a recent publication.
- **Surf the Internet.** Internet sites such as www.fastweb.com provide a free college search. You can also find college blogs online to give you an inside look at campus life and activities.
- **Talk with an admissions representative.** An admissions representative can answer just about all of your questions with a single phone call.
- **Call the school's alumni association.** Schedule an interview with an alumnus of the school who can offer advice and share his/her collegiate experience, including activities in which you may be interested in participating.

Campus Visit Tips

- **Pick a regular day to visit.** Have multiple dates and times. Avoid major events or holidays, such as spring break, and ask for a guided tour. Arrange to speak to other students, faculty members, financial aid, admissions and career offices. Send a thank-you note to all those you meet!
- **Pack smart.** Pack more casual clothes for when you walk around campus and something more formal for an interview with the admissions office.
- **Stay in a dorm overnight.** Sit in on a class to see how it is conducted. Speak with current students and professors about what life on campus is like.
- **View other campus buildings.** Check out residence hall rooms, cafeterias, computer labs, health and recreational facilities, the library, etc.
- **Eat in the dining hall.** This is a great place to see students and even see what you could eat if you attend.
- **Record your experience.** After your campus visits, make a list of the good and bad points about each school. Use the questions below to guide you in your college choice.
- **Meet current students from your school.** Meet with a student from your school or your local area to get a better idea about the transition.

College Choice Questions to Consider

Academics and Career Planning

- Does the college offer the academic major that interests me? What's the reputation of the program you desire? Is the timeline for your program of study four years or more?
- What is the average class size? What is the student-to-faculty ratio? Are most classes taught by professors or by a teaching assistant?
- What kinds of career-planning services are available? How many graduates find jobs in their field of study? Does the school offer internships and research opportunities in your field of interest?
- How easy is it to switch academic majors? Will it mean spending more time in school?

Finances

- What is the out-of-pocket as a bottom line cost (difference between the cost of attendance and gift aid, such as grants and scholarships)?
- What is my actual cost? Other expenses beyond just the "sticker price" for tuition can include:
 - application and other fees
 - add/drop a course fees
 - food and clothing expenses
 - health insurance costs
 - student activity fees
 - transportation expenses (insurance, gas, parking fees)
- What is the average increase in tuition and other costs from year to year? View at least three years worth of data to chart past increases.

Student Life

- Do you feel you fit in and feel comfortable on campus?
- Is the campus diverse? Will you meet students different than you?
- What student organizations are on campus? Does the school offer a variety of recreational activities, varsity and intramural and club sports? Are they ones you would want to join?
- What's the social scene like? What is the campus like on the weekends? Do many students leave campus? What kinds of student activities are planned?
- Do you need a car? Are jobs close to campus? Do you need to drive to any classes? Is public transit accessible?

Housing and Campus Resources

- What is the status of student housing? What is the cost? Is off-campus housing available? Is campus housing available for all four years? Are the dorms well maintained or in poor condition?
- Is the campus safe? What services does campus security provide? What is the surrounding area like?
- What is the quality of campus resources? Are facilities up-to-date? Is wireless access available?
- What meal plans are available? What is served in the dining hall? Are special dietary plans available? Are there after-hours options? Does the meal plan extend off campus? What about money/meals that go unused?