

Oak Ridge High School

How to Apply for Scholarships

Welcome to the World of Scholarships!

The process of applying for scholarships is a little like applying for jobs. First, you need to get your skills & experience firmly set in your mind. Second, you find places that are a good match for you. And finally, you begin filling out applications. It requires a little time and effort, but every year Oak Ridge High School students win thousands of dollars from local sponsors, individuals, and community organizations. In addition, many students have been awarded thousands more from federal, state, and campus funded programs. They were competitive and met the challenges of essays, application forms, letters of reference, and deadlines. You can do it too! If you don't try, you can't win!

Brainstorm

Where do you begin? Brainstorm your accomplishments – include the month and year. You'll have to brag about yourself a little, so put some thought into it. Get someone to help you. You've probably done more than you can fit on a page! Get a sheet of paper & jot down some notes, you'll need them later... List all of your accomplishments & month/year:

academic achievements	extra-curricular
special honors	awards
clubs	athletics
special skills	work experience
scouting	hobbies
church-affiliated	offices held
community service	leadership roles
other	other

Request Letters of Recommendation

Get a 'Letter of Recommendation Profile' from the Career Center and fill it out. Make a couple copies of it. Find at least two people to give it to, three or four is better. Good choices would be teachers/staff members who know you well, coaches, or others who have seen the best in you. Remember to give them at least 2 weeks lead time to write the letter! (That's why you're doing this step first.) Many scholarships ask that one of the letters of recommendation be from someone NOT

at the school. You may want to ask your neighbor, your boss, or a community member to write a letter for you. **Always send the person who wrote your letter a THANK YOU note. Even a simple handwritten note saying, "Thank you very much for the time & effort you took in writing me such a nice letter of recommendation," will go a long way to show the person that you appreciate the time they took to help you out.**

Search for Local Scholarships

Register at www.CALocalscholarships.org. This website has a list of scholarships that are open ONLY to El Dorado County students, which really limits your competition – a very good resource. **If you only look one place for scholarships, this is the place to look!** The personal data they ask you for is used to filter for scholarships that match your profile. You may begin your profile in mid-October of your senior year. Most of these local scholarships are due in early March. These scholarships generally require a scholarship packet (described later in this handbook) to be turned into either the Career Center or mailed yourself.

On-line Searches

- www.fastweb.com, www.scholarships.com

These are national databases of scholarship opportunities. They will ask you a zillion questions, and filter the scholarships they show you based on your answers.

****Note:** it is helpful to have a separate e-mail address for these databases, as they tend to overload your account with lots of spam.

****Also Note:** when using these websites, always pay careful attention to the purpose of the screens and/or fields you're filling out. Many of the advertisements are difficult to distinguish from profile questions and you may accidentally sign up for a credit card or request that a college contact you. If a screen looks strange to you, look for a small text link that says something like "no thanks" or "continue."

- Search for regional scholarships:

Google / Yahoo search for regional scholarships: Search with the words Scholarship and Sacramento Region, Greater Sacramento Area, Northern California, Sacramento & Surrounding Counties – you get the idea. Check with the Career Center to find any that we've learned about. New scholarships come in weekly, so check back often. Also search the region where you're planning to attend college. Remember, the smaller the application area, the smaller the applicant pool will be, and therefore the greater your chance of winning a scholarship.

- Basic online searches:

Go to your favorite search engine (Yahoo, Google, etc.) and search with the words: scholarship, _____. Fill in the blank with something about yourself, your family, or interests – like golf, catholic, cancer, Asian, asthma, bagpipes, etc.

Maybe your nationality, religion or intended college major; or try tall, vegetarian, or glasses; hobbies such as equestrian or amateur radio; causes like peace or

environmentalism; sports you play; an employer or group you volunteered for. Check your resume for ideas. This will begin your scholarship search for those characteristics that are unique to you.

- Search with your parents in mind:

Same Google / Yahoo search as above, but fill in the blank with your parents' affiliations – clubs, community service groups, fraternities, unions, banks, professional organizations. Also try their employer or field – agriculture, nursing, law enforcement, PG&E, Intel, etc. Or maybe something in your family history, like military service, cancer, or hurricane.

- Search the college's website:

Most colleges (and their affiliated organizations) offer scholarships that you can apply for. Go to each college website and enter 'scholarship' in their search field. See what they have available.

Special note: Beware of scholarship scams!

The main rule here is – if it asks for money for any reason, consider it suspicious. Other danger signs are a money-back guarantee, the absence of contact information, or the request to verify a credit card number. An official-sounding name using "national," "federal" or "administration" is no guarantee it is legitimate. Always look for a valid email, phone number, and street address, and if it seems too good to be true – it probably is!

Anatomy of a Winning Scholarship Packet

Whereas many scholarships only require an online application, there are still several local scholarships which request an actual scholarship packet. With so many students competing for scholarship money these days, how do you separate your application from all of the rest? Just follow these steps to make a professional-looking 'Scholarship Portfolio'.

1. Cover Page:

Create a cover page that lists the name of the scholarship you're applying for, and your name. Take a simple, posed picture of yourself and enlarge it. Why a photo? Think about it – when was the last time you threw a photo away? A picture establishes a personal connection, making it harder for the scholarship committee to put your application aside. It may be a good idea to bind your whole application in an inexpensive see-through report cover. If the scholarship instructions ask you not to use a report cover, or cover page, or table of contents, then you should respect those directions and follow them.

2. Table of Contents:

Just like a report, your portfolio needs a table of contents. The table of contents should be your second page, behind your cover and should give

page numbers for your packet's various components. Why a table of contents? It just looks more professional.

3. The Application Form:

Where do you get the application? This is an especially important question when working on applications from the calocalscholarships website. Many of these use the standard application from the calocalscholarships website. If a scholarship refers you to the Career Center or another website for an application, it usually means they do not accept the general application. Don't waste your time – make sure you get the correct application.

4. The Resume:

Some scholarship applications will ask for a resume. This is simply a list of your awards, accomplishments, work experience, clubs, offices held, volunteerism, sports, etc. You can use the list you brainstormed at the beginning of this workbook to help you. Samples are available in the Career Center. Microsoft Office Word programs have templates you can use for developing your resume.

5. Letters of Recommendation:

Remember to get them early!! Most scholarships are going to ask for at least two letters of recommendation – usually one from a school staff member, and one from a community member. It is best to have two letters from each source, for a total of four letters of recommendation. Remember to fill out the student data form provided in this packet and give it to those writing letters for you. **Always, always, always** send the person a thank you note. It shows the person that you appreciated the time they took to help you out. Also, if there is no rule against it, you may send out more letters of recommendation than asked for.

6. The Essay / Personal Statement:

Most scholarship applications require you to write something – an essay or a personal statement. Some will want to know about your background, others will ask about your educational or career plans. It is important to read the essay prompt carefully and be sure to address the topic. Remember that your goal is to give the reader a glimpse of who you are; information not otherwise covered in the general application. Invest some time in self-reflection to think of a story or circumstance that reflects your personal qualities, and use that story to make your point. Have someone read your first draft to make sure the idea works, and then have one or two other people read your almost-final draft. You want to make sure that your work looks neat, you make your point clearly, you capitalize proper nouns, and that there are no grammatical or spelling errors.

Remember, the essay is your chance to show that YOU are their ideal candidate!

7. The Transcript:

Official or Unofficial? Unless the scholarship specifically asks for an official transcript, use an unofficial one. An official transcript must be obtained from

the counseling office with a 24-hour turnaround time (Remember – if you open the envelope, the transcript becomes unofficial.). You can get an unofficial transcript on-the-spot in the Career Center for free.

8. The Finishing Touches:

Read your scholarship guidelines carefully. Make sure to include any other types of required documentation. If you are missing anything, your application will likely be rejected.

9. Turn it in to the right place – on time!

Read your scholarship guidelines again. Where, when, and how do you submit your application packet? Mail it? Drop it off at a place of business? Hand it in at the Career Center? Is it “postmarked by” or “received by”? Don’t waste your time and effort. Get it to the right place – on time!

Your scholarship application is a reflection of you!

You want to make the best impression possible. Therefore prior to submitting your application, check it for overall completeness, neatness, spelling errors, and have someone else look over the entire application.

And when you win...

Always remember to thank the sponsor promptly. Not only is it polite, the sponsors really like to know that their efforts are appreciated.

HOW TO WIN THE \$\$\$ FOR COLLEGE: TIPS FOR GETTING SCHOLARSHIPS

BY ANNIE LE, UNION MINE HIGH SCHOOL

The big scholarship myth is that someone else always wins and it could never happen to you, but take your chances: that someone might just be *you!* Every college bound senior in high school agonizes over financing his or her college education, and applying to scholarships is a time-consuming process that may or may not pay off. Since I am planning to attend a private university, I am facing a whopping \$39,000 per year, and many of my classmates are just as horrified by their future school bills of around \$14,000 or more per year. With such a heavy price to pay for my education, I spent my entire summer break before senior year as well as my senior year gambling away my time and energy for a chance at the big win, and I have been very successful thus far. I have won a total of \$65,050 to date, and I am awaiting decisions from about 70 other scholarship programs. How did I win so much? Well, I simply applied to 102 scholarships, 92 of which were national programs and very competitive (did you catch the irony in “simply”?).

The first step to applying to as many scholarships as you can is *finding* the scholarships. This can be tough, as there are many companies that offer scholarships but fail to advertise them. The solution: make a long list of companies, clubs and words that describe you that you can punch into a search engine. Even after you find your scholarships, these programs will make it hard for you and make you send them a request for an application with a self-addressed, stamped envelope or download one from their website after clicking through two million and three links. After you finally get the application, retrieve all the documentation needed from your bank of assorted letters of recommendation (from school, volunteer organizations, employer, etc), and essays on your goals, obstacles overcome, and other such common topics, all varying in length to meet an individual program’s requirement. It is best to get all the essays and letters squared away over the summer before senior year starts, so when you get an application, you can just attach the documentation. Yes, once you start this process, it will transform into a simple, easy but tedious assembly line. In fact, it has gotten to the point at which my tongue is sore from licking envelopes, my wrist hurts from typing and stapling, and the post office clerk knows me on a first name basis, but other than that, there is nothing I can complain about; it was not difficult at all! Just learn how to operate a copier, printer and stapler, set up a bed in the career center, and you will be rolling in free money.

I have learned all of this from firsthand experience, horrifyingly enough (but the winning is loads of fun!). I hope my little spiel encourages all of you to apply for scholarships; it is a lot of hard work, but you will definitely win, as long as you put your heart and some lunch times into it. Best wishes to the Class of 2004 and beyond on your scholarships.

ANNIE’S FINAL SCHOLARSHIP TOTAL

\$160,000

Sample Scholarship Checklist

Scholarship Name: _____

Date Due: (Postmark or received by?) _____

Where & how do I submit my application? _____

Items Needed

- Cover page with photo (even if not required)
- Table of Contents
- Application
- Personal Statement
- Resume
- Letter(s) of Recommendation
 - Number from School _____
 - Number from Community _____
- Transcript
 - Official
 - Unofficial

**Remember this is just an example. Read your guidelines carefully and be sure to include every required item.

**Keep it neat & organize. Set up a system, maybe a folder or a large envelope to make sure items don't get lost or wrinkled beyond recognition. Remember as you go along to keep a list of scholarship applications you've already submitted. Also, make note of those scholarships which are renewable.

