

The Scholarship Personal Essay

The Personal Essay is the most important part of your scholarship application. This is your chance to let the Scholarship Committee or Donor know your educational and career goals, why you have selected your stated major and career goal, your life experiences which have influenced this decision, and your anticipated role in society after your career goal has been achieved. It is as if you had ten minutes to sit face-to-face with the Committee or Donor and let them know why you feel you should be a recipient of a scholarship from Riverside Community College District. However, to put all this on paper can be difficult and even intimidating.

1. First, let's begin with the **basic format** of your essay:

- Be sure to include your name and student ID# in the heading.
- Your essay should be no more than 2 pages.
- Make your essay easy to read. Remember, the Committee or Donor will be reading many essays, and although you want your essay to stand out you do not want it to be hard on the eyes while reading. It is better to use your words to show your uniqueness, rather than complicated lettering. The easiest to read is 12 point, Times New Roman font.
- If possible, double space your essay with one inch margins.

2. Now, regarding the **content**: You may be asking, "Where do I begin?" There are endless ideas and suggestions as to how to write a personal essay for scholarships. However the following suggestions will make it easy to organize your thoughts and personal information into a concise and easy to read essay.

Create an Outline: Just getting started is often the hardest part. To begin, make an outline of the things you would like to say in your essay such as:

- Your educational and career goals,
- Why you have selected your stated major and career goal,
- Your life experiences which have influenced this decision,
- Your anticipated role in society after your career goal has been achieved,
- Why you need the scholarship or any unusual circumstances which may affect your current financial situation,
- Anything else you feel the Scholarship Committee or Donor needs to know about you in order to present yourself as the best candidate for the scholarship.

Write your essay: Next, you need to organize the outline into an essay. The following is an easy guide to help you arrange your ideas and thoughts into a well thought out essay.

1. First Paragraph: The first paragraph is considered your introduction.
 - a. The introduction is often the most difficult to write. It may be a good idea to start on the body of the essay and come back to write the introduction later.
 - b. The introduction is where you want to catch the reader's attention and make them want to continue reading.
 - c. Be creative, do not start your essay with, "My name is John Doe and I am applying for this scholarship."
 - d. Explain why you chose your major and/or career goal.
 - e. You may also want to begin with a personal story, a favorite or inspirational quote, or even a joke. Remember, your purpose is to grab the reader's attention and entice them to continue reading.

2. **Body of Essay:** The body of your essay should be 2-3 paragraphs and is the main part or “meat” of your essay. This is where you tell about you, your story, your life, accomplishments and plans for the future, and the reason you need the scholarship funds. Be sincere and speak from your heart. Just try not to be too wordy or make it too long.
 - a. The easiest way to write this part of your essay is to think in terms of Past, Present and Future: Where have you been? Where are you now? Where are you going? This will cover just about everything you need to say: Life experiences and circumstances that have led you to choose your educational and career goals; Reasons for choosing these goals or experiences which have influenced your decisions; What have you done and what are you doing now in your life to achieve your goals; What are your plans for the future and what will you do once you have achieved your educational goal and how you will contribute to society.
 - b. If you have had negative circumstances or difficulties in your life, they can be mentioned briefly, but state how you have positively overcome them. Don't be “whiney” or talk about how tragic and sad your life has been. The scholarship Committee is looking for individuals who have prevailed over difficult circumstances and have a commitment to succeed despite a hard or unstable life.
 - c. If you mention any of your personal qualities, give an example of how you have used or demonstrated that quality. For example, if you state that you are a responsible person, give an example of how you have shown responsibility.
 - d. Explain any circumstances regarding your financial situation (especially if it has changed since you completed the FAFSA, such as job loss, etc.) and why you need the scholarship funds.
 - e. Talk about your academic history, what classes you have taken to further your educational goal, your scholastic successes, what your plans are at RCCD and/or your future University and how they will translate into your career and life goals.

3. **Conclusion:** The conclusion of your essay may contain the following:
 - a. Express gratitude to the Donor or Committee for taking the time to read and review your application.
 - b. Explain how the scholarship funds will help you if you are awarded the scholarship.
 - c. Mention how you will give back to society or the community.
 - d. Complete the circle by re-stating something from your introduction.

Finally, the following suggestions will help to **perfect your essay**:

- After you have written a first draft, put it away and don't think about it for a few days. Then, re-read it. This will help you have fresh thoughts and ideas to make necessary changes.
- Re-write and re-visit several times. If it is too long, shorten it by taking out unnecessary sentences.
- Read your essay out loud to yourself to see if it flows well.
- Have other people read it for content and ask for feedback.
- The most important of all: have someone read it to check for correct grammar, spelling and punctuation. Remember, there are faculty members on the Scholarship Committee. They may not continue reading after the first misspelled word or wrong punctuation.

There are also many websites that give excellent information on writing a scholarship essay (of course, always be careful not to pay for access to any sites offering help on writing a scholarship essay). You may want to visit some of the following sites for additional ideas and suggestions regarding scholarships. Each has sections about writing a scholarship essay.

www.essayinfo.com

www.scholarshiphelp.org

www.financialaidtips.org