Secrets to Winning a Scholarship

Credit to Mark Kantrowitz
Publisher of Fastweb and FinAid
Strategies for Winning Scholarships

► It’s a numbers game
  ► Even among talented students, who wins involves a bit of luck, not just skill
  ► To win more scholarships, apply to more scholarships, but only if you qualify

► You can’t win if you don’t apply
  ► One in four students never applies for financial aid

► It gets easier after your first 6 applications
  ► Essays can be reused and tailored to each new application

► Don’t miss deadlines
Searching for Scholarships

- Start searching as soon as possible
  - If you wait until spring to start searching, you will miss half the deadlines
- Use a free scholarship matching service like Fastweb
More Ways of Searching for Money

- Look for local scholarships on bulletin boards near the financial aid offices, or the library’s jobs and careers section
- Answer the optional questions on a scholarship matching service for twice as many matches
- Look for near-miss matches
- Pursue less competitive scholarships, such as small awards and essay contests, since they are easier to win, the money adds up and they help you win bigger scholarships
Tips on Winning Scholarships

- Prioritize your applications by deadline and the expected value of the scholarship
- Use a calendar and checklist to get organized
- Create an accomplishments resume
- Tailor your application to the sponsor’s goals
- Read and follow the instructions
- Make your application stand out from the crowd
- Ask to be nominated
- Practice on a copy of the application form
Writing a Winning Scholarship Essay

- Answer the essay question orally and transcribe the recording
- Use an outline to organize your thoughts
- Give examples and be specific
- Personalize your essay and be passionate
- Write about something of interest to you
- Talk about your impact on other people
- Proofread a printed copy of the essay for spelling and grammar errors and ask others to proofread for you
Tips for Letters of Recommendation

- Ask the person whether he/she can write you a great letter of recommendation
- The recommendation should be relevant to the scholarship sponsor’s goal
- Provide the recommender with a copy of your accomplishments resume
- Provide the recommender with a SASE and all required forms
- Thank the recommender for writing the letter
Other Scholarship Application Tips

▶ Use a professional email address, such as firstname.lastname@gmail.com
▶ Clean up the content of your Facebook account, removing inappropriate and immature material
▶ Google your name to see what shows up
▶ Make a photocopy of your application before mailing it
▶ Send the application by certified mail, return receipt requested or with delivery confirmation
▶ If rejected, ask for the reviewer comments
After You Win a Scholarship

- Write a letter of appreciation to the donor/foundation!
- If your scholarship is renewable, review the requirements for retaining eligibility
- Understand the taxability of your scholarships
  - Amounts for tuition, fees, books, supplies tax-free
  - Amounts for room and board, transportation and other living expenses are taxable
Beware of Scholarship Scams

- If you have to pay money to get money, it is probably a scam
- Never invest more than a postage stamp to get information about scholarships or to apply for a scholarship
- Nobody can guarantee that you’ll win a scholarship
- Do not give out personal information like bank account numbers, credit card numbers or Social Security numbers
- Beware of the unclaimed aid myth
Most Common Application Mistakes

- Missing deadlines
- Failing to proofread the application
- Failing to follow directions (essay length, number of recommendations)
- Omitting required information
- Applying for an award when you don’t qualify
- Failing to apply for an award for which you are eligible
- Failing to tailor the application to the sponsor
- Writing a boring essay
Scholarship Apps

Yes, you can use your phone to get scholarships, too! All of the below apps are available for Android and iphone.

- Scholarships.com Mobile App
- Fastweb College Scholarships App
- Scholly Scholarship Search App (See reacherhighermontana.org for free code!)
- SAIL Scholarship Search App
Key Scholarship Resources

- http://msun.edu/finaid/scholarships
- www.mus.edu/Prepare/Pay/Scholarships
- www.finaid.org/scholarshipscams
- www.ftc.gov/scholarshipscams
- www.finaid.org/taxbenefits
Scholarship Search Engines

- www.sfs.mus.edu/scholarship_search
- www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org
- www.fastweb.com
- www.scholarships.com
- www.scholarshipmonkey.com
Enter to Win!
www.reachhighermontana.org/scholarships/

Get ready to apply for Reach Higher Montana Scholarships

- Are you a Montana high school senior or graduate?
- Do you have a 2.5 cumulative GPA?
- Will you attend a Montana college?
  (at least halftime in 2018-19)
- Then you are eligible to apply for a $1,000 Reach Higher Montana Scholarship
- Apply at ReachHigherMontana.org after Dec. 1, 2017
  and submit your application by Jan. 15, 2018.

Note: Immediate family members of Reach Higher Montana and Student Assistance Foundation employees are excluded from applying for Reach Higher Montana scholarships.