

Apply For Scholarships Not Associated With The College's Financial Aid Office

By Sandy Killingsworth

A great place to start your scholarship search is on the Internet using your favorite search engine. Type in the word "scholarship" and you will be amazed at what pops up. Searching for scholarships is an extremely time consuming task, and applying for those scholarships is definitely not for the faint-hearted. Completing the applications, collecting the necessary information and documents, composing the essays, and submitting everything by a deadline date can be overwhelming. But if you are determined to find money to pay for part of your education then you might want to let one of the scholarship search services like *FASTWEB.com* or *SRNexpress.com* help. These are free services to you, although advertising foots the bill. To start this service you must set up an "account" by answering lots of questions. While some of the questions might seem rather odd, there is a scholarship out there somewhere for those who can answer the question in the affirmative. As scholarship opportunities come to the attention of these services, they send you an e-mail notification that the opportunity is available. It is then up to you to research the scholarship further and determine if you truly are eligible to apply. You then make the choice to apply or pass up the opportunity. These scholarship search services only search the Internet for you; they do not apply for you. Never be fooled by companies or businesses that promise to search for scholarships for you for a fee. They do nothing more that what you can do with your free time on the Internet or what the free search services do. They have no more access to unknown scholarships than other search companies. You may receive letters in the mail requesting that you attend a seminar to learn how to get free money for college or they may request that you call a certain telephone number to set up an appointment time to learn of scholarship money that has been set aside for you. Do not be fooled. **IT'S A SCAM!!!!** There are laws in place to try to combat this practice, but often these criminals set up shop temporarily, collect your money and are gone before they can be detained. Visit the Federal Trade Commission's website to find a list of fraudulent companies who practice scholarship scams. Their web address is <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/edcams/scholarship/cases.htm>.

The LHS Guidance website has a list of scholarships that students can apply for. There are two pages of scholarships. One page contains a descriptive list of scholarships that are available to anyone surfing the Internet. The description contains information regarding eligibility, document requirements, and deadline dates. Another page on the website contains those local scholarships that only students at Longview High School may apply for. The list of local scholarships provides information on eligibility, required attachments, and deadline dates, also. Below are some tips to remember when applying for any scholarship:

- If you have a lot of scholarships to apply for, organize them by deadline dates and complete them in that order. Do not expect scholarship organizations to accept your application after the deadline date. It is your responsibility to manage your time so that you can complete the application and collect the necessary attachments. Punctuality, as well as following instructions, is part of the criteria by which your application will be evaluated.
- Compose an essay using the prompt, *What are my goals for the future?* Try to write a good essay that is no more than 300 words in length. Have your English teacher critique it for you. You can use this for many different scholarships.
- Get letters of recommendation from teachers, from employers, and people in the community and/or church. If you have been in some sort of volunteer program, get the person in charge to write one for you. Come by the Scholarship Drawer to get the *Senior Data Sheet*. Complete it, make copies of it, and give it to the people you ask to write letters of recommendations for you. The information will assist them in describing you to whomever the letter is addressed.
- Make copies of all of your letters of recommendation. You can use them for all of your scholarships.

- Make sure that you read the instructions on the scholarship applications carefully. Here is something you may not know. When an organization sends LHS an application, they usually attach a cover letter addressed to the counselor with an explanation of the judging criteria. Most often “*how well student follows directions*” is one of the judging criteria. Watch for the obscure instructions throughout the application. Many students miss these, and, consequently, their applications are discarded.

The Basic Requirements of Most Scholarships

Almost every scholarship you apply for requests the following information and/or documents to be included/attached:

1. The completed application
2. An official transcript
3. An essay
4. Letters of recommendation

Some applications may also request a recent photo as well as other attachments related to the scholarships, such as artwork, poetry, etc. Here are some tips to use when collecting the documents and attachments.

- The application should be typed or printed in BLACK ink. Why black? Because it photocopies better than blue. Many times your application will be copied and sent to several judges for perusal.
- An official transcript is one that bears the seal affixed by the LHS registrar, Mrs. Fugler. An official transcript will have an imprint of the official seal of the Texas Education Agency that you can feel. **Please allow 24 hours from the time you request your transcript until you pick it up.** Mrs. Fugler has other equally important tasks to complete during the day in addition to copying transcripts, and she needs time to look up your GPA and convert it to a 4.0 scale. Also, remember that it is actually a more efficient use of Mrs. Fugler’s time if she can make several copies of your transcript at a time rather than one today and one tomorrow. You may request up to 5 transcripts at a time.
- Your class rank will most likely change at the end of the 3rd week of the 5th six weeks. Also any college entrance test scores recently received will be affixed to the back of your transcript as soon as they are received. For these reasons, you will want to request the most recently updated transcripts for your scholarships, especially if your GPA and class rank improve!
- If you discover some information is missing from your transcript, such as a credit earned in middle school, test scores (PSAT, SAT, ACT, AP), credit received through credit by exam, credit by acceleration, etc. please make the error known to the registrar so that it can be resolved ASAP. It may take time to investigate the reason for the error and it must be resolved before graduation!
- Write the best essay that you can and then ask someone, perhaps your English teacher to critique it. Often it is the essay that breaks a tie for the scholarship judges. There are books on how to write a good ear - catching essay to use for scholarships and college admissions. Some applications will give you a prompt for your essay. Others will ask a question that you answer in essay form. Still others ask you to pick your own subject. Obviously grammar, punctuation and spelling will be judged, but how the essay moves the judges is often the one thing that sets your essay apart from all of the others. Look in the career center section of the LHS library for books on writing a great essay. Also, ask your English teacher for resources. Don’t forget the Internet when searching for help. Although you probably won’t find many essays to read, many websites will offer tips and things to avoid.
- Letters of recommendation (or letters of references) help judges to know a bit more about how others relate to you. Almost every scholarship application requests at least one letter of recommendation and some request as many as four letters. Usually the instructions are quite specific regarding the relationship of the recommender to you. It would be wise to ask several teachers, a counselor and/or principal, your minister, an employer, or friend to write a letter of recommendation for you. You might suggest that they compose the letter to the “scholarship committee” without naming a specific scholarship, because this will allow you to make copies of the letter to use for other scholarship applications. Request letters of recommendation from at least three people, but have another person in mind should you need a fourth letter. Always remember to thank those who recommend you.

You may encounter an application that asks you to submit your high school *resume*. What is a high school resume? It is basically a *list* of important information about you that you would want judges to know about you when considering you for an award. From a scholarship judge's perspective, the advantage of using a resume is that it is a quick method of noting the applicant's strong points. While the essay can reveal a great deal about you, it can take the judges a great deal of time to pick out the important points. The resume is a quick way to present your strengths, accomplishments, etc to the judges. The resume should list background information, academic information, career goals, community service, hobbies, and any other information that you think might set your application apart from all others. The Internet is a great resource for creating a resume.

Don't forget to apply for scholarships and other forms of financial aid after you enroll in college. There are actually more funds, foundations, endowments, etc. set up by college alumni to assist students already enrolled in an institution. You should keep in touch with the financial aid officer of the college or university that you attend. The financial aid offices at most major colleges publish a newsletter that contains scholarship opportunities. Find out how your college publicizes these opportunities.



Get Organized

My best advice for juniors about to plunge into not only the world of a high school senior but also the world of preparing for college is to **take initiative**.

1. Your high school counselor is a great way to get helpful information, but you have to do research, too. I come from a fairly small school; however, the workload of my high school counselor is still very demanding. So, I had to make the most of the time that I got with her. I noticed she was more willing to help students when they were more willing to do some work.
2. I always kept extra transcripts on hand to use for scholarship applications, I kept track of my school information, and I searched for scholarships myself. I know more about my qualifications than the counselors anyway, so why should I rely on her to find scholarships that match my credentials?
3. I treated my time spent applying for scholarships like it was a second part-time job.
4. Keeping things organized is very important. I kept a folder with copies of transcripts, award letters, recommendation letters, acceptance letters, etc., all the information that scholarships typically request. I kept all the applications on the other side, each page paper-clipped together with an addressed envelope, in order of their deadline date. I kept this folder with me everyday and worked on the applications in my spare time.

Because of my dedication to the scholarship applications, I now have all the money I need to pay for college. I will not have to worry about my finances at all. Students should apply for every scholarship that they are eligible for, don't even take time to think whether or not you have a chance to win. You won't have a chance if you don't apply.

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This and other advice from college students who sought and won financial aid can be found at http://www.collegeanswer.com/preparing/content/prep_college_advice.jsp