**7 Tips on Applying for Scholarships:**

*How to handle the process with accuracy and ease.*

Johnna Martinez, Scholarship and Grant Expert

WHEN APPLYING for college scholarships it is important to make the best impression possible. This application process is in many ways like any other interview process. Chances are your first interaction will be written *(digital or hard copy)* so it is important you market yourself to stand out from the competition. In this case, “bragging” isn’t all bad.

*Here are seven tips any student applying for scholarships should consider:*

**START YOUR SEARCH EARLY.** Sounds simple enough, but the more time you have to find scholarships that you are qualified for, and the more time you have to build a case for why you should receive it, the better. Rushing to complete paperwork at the last minute can lead to oversights, spelling and grammatical errors or cutting corners; all of which can seriously hurt your chances of being selected.

**LEAVE NO STONE UNTURNED.** I recently wrote an article titled *6 Places to Look for Scholarships*. It’s absolutely a great idea to apply for scholarships that can cover all your tuition, but don’t rule out the smaller opportunities. Look for scholarships not only at the state and national level, but within your local community as well. Ask people who have been through the process to help you generate additional leads. Consider opportunities that are based on your ancestry, creed, religious affiliation, or gender. In addition, take into account the places you volunteer, your employer or memberships in professional organizations.

**OBSERVE INDIVIDUAL SCHOLARSHIP DEADLINES.** Chances are you may be applying for several scholarships; prioritize these to make sure you turn in the requested information on time.

**PROVIDE COMPLETE AND ACCURATE INFORMATION.** Being on time is just one piece of the puzzle. Being accurate, truthful and complete is just as important. If you knowingly falsify information on a scholarship application, you could be disqualified. While it may feel redundant as you are repeating your information for the tenth time, remember this is the first time those awarding each specific scholarship get to meet you *(online/on paper)*. So be sure to proofread your application and have someone else review it to make sure there are no oversights.

**LINE UP YOUR REFERENCES.** If you need a letter of recommendation or two, do you have a plan of who to ask? Are you able to have a standard letter that you have several copies of, or can you connect with this person and receive a customized version that meets your time frame? Keep in mind the time it takes a recommender to compose a well-written reference. Avoid waiting until the last minute to ask someone. They may tell you no, or they may rush through it in order to complete it on time, thereby providing a poor quality reference.

**KNOW YOUR BIO.** What are some relevant achievements (academic and non-academic), awards received, leadership roles held, extracurricular involvement, etc. you have that you would want to mention? If you are filling out several applications this may seem redundant. Create a list by category and include dates so that as you fill out the forms you can make sure you are not missing any valuable information while still tailoring each application to the criteria for that scholarship.

**BE AWARE OF THE FAFSA.** You’ll probably see references to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in a lot of financial aid information. Filling out the FAFSA is an important step, as this transmits your financial information to the schools of your choice. Many needs-based scholarships require that you complete the FAFSA regardless if you plan to utilize federal funding. If it is too early to complete a FAFSA, just keep this important task on your radar.

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Missing deadlines, submitting incomplete or inaccurate information, or failing to make the best impression can result in you being eliminated from scholarships for which you are seemingly well qualified. With some careful planning and a commitment to quality throughout the process, you can work to make your application shine.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Johnna Martinez is sought after for her expertise in helping students understand available resources and how to attain help to finance their degrees. As Manager, Scholarship and Grants for Bellevue University, she launched a new scholarship management system, providing students better information on scholarship funding options available, as well as a simpler way to apply for them. Her skills as a strategist have developed an aptitude in aligning scholarship and grant resources to increase available funding for students. Her experience working with students, at both the high school and higher education levels, has made her a go-to resource and a respected community advocate. She holds a Bachelor's in Psychology and a Master's in Human Services – Mental Health Counseling.