

Scholarship Tips from PHEAA

Scholarship Application Tips

1. Use free scholarship search sites such as www.EducationPlanner.org to find a wide array of scholarships for which you may qualify. Also be sure to check with your employer and your parents' employers.
2. Don't shy away from smaller scholarships or ones which require an essay. There is often less competition for these awards, so your chance of success is greater.
3. Write one really good essay. Focus on describing yourself in a way that is not already reflected on your transcript. In other words, focus on attributes, not academics. Use this essay each time one is required in the application process.
4. Be grammatically correct. Always use proper English, write in complete sentences, and use proper punctuation.
5. Be sure your essay addresses the key requirements of the scholarship. Your basic essay might be fine, but you may need to revise it slightly for different awards.
6. Focus on things you have done outside the classroom, such as extracurricular activities, part time employment, and community service. Discuss ways in which your involvement in these activities has made you a better person.
7. Be very mindful of deadlines, and submit your applications early. Late applications almost always go on the "NO" pile.
8. Be prepared to work. It takes time to search for scholarships and to submit applications. But hard work has its rewards, and the more free money you earn through scholarships the less you will need to borrow to pay for college.
9. Don't wait until senior year to start searching for scholarships. Begin searching during your sophomore or junior year, and make a list of any scholarships for which you might qualify.
10. Once you enroll in college, search for scholarships EVERY YEAR. This should be done both online and through your college's Financial Aid Office. Each year you change as a scholarship candidate – you advance in grade level, you may join new clubs and organizations, you may change your major, new awards are made available, and some awards are reserved for upperclassmen. By searching every year you will maximize your chances of success.

Avoiding Scholarship Scams

1. Never pay a fee for a scholarship. This includes a website, agency or person who claims they will help you find free money. Scammers use bogus fees and terms such as “application, disbursement, redemption and processing fees” as a way to steal your money. Scholarships are free money and should not require any fees!
2. Never provide a credit card, bank or savings account information. Scammers will steal your identity and ruin your credit for years to come. If you do, call your bank or credit card immediately and cancel your accounts.
3. If you see or hear the word “Guarantee” walk away. No one controls judges’ decisions and there are no scholarship guarantees out there.
4. Be wary of offers that claim to involve little or no work. Real scholarships take time, energy and work.
5. Before you apply for a scholarship check all the contact information. The scholarship sponsor should supply a valid email address, phone number and mailing address. A PO Box is not a valid address for contact information.
6. Avoid unsolicited scholarship requests. If you are told that you have received an award for which you never applied, be alert. Ask where the sponsor found your name and contact information, and research the information carefully.
7. Free scholarship or “financial planning” seminars often end with a sales pitch to “act now or lose out on this opportunity”. This can often lead to the purchase of various financial products such as insurance. Legitimate organizations do not use these types of pressure tactics.
8. An official sounding name or endorsement doesn’t automatically mean it is real or legitimate. Scammers may use words like “national”, “education”, or “federal”, or they may have an official looking seal.
9. Some scammers tell students there are millions of scholarships out there that go unclaimed because students don’t know where to apply. This is FALSE! Check out www.educationplanner.org for scholarships opportunities.
10. Look for typing and spelling errors on the scholarship materials. Application materials that contain typing and spelling errors or look nonprofessional may be an indication of a scam. Many misspell the word “scholarship” as “scholorship”.