

Tips for Writing Strong Scholarship Essays

Study abroad can be expensive! Between the differences in cost of living, side trips, books, and getting the most out of your international experience, the Pounds, Pesos, Won, Yen, dollars, Cedis, and Euros can quickly add up. Luckily, scholarships are available for students studying abroad.

Many scholarship applications require an essay of some sort. This is for a number of reasons, most importantly, the selection committee wants to get to know the applicant and understand why the applicant is choosing to go abroad. It's far easier for them to award you the scholarship if they get to know a little bit about you and your background. Selection committees also want to make sure that they award students who will make the most of this once in a life-time opportunity, therefore it is very important that you can adequately express your goals for your international experience.

General tips for writing your scholarship essay:

- **Read Directions:** The type of essay can vary widely, from a personal statement to a project proposal, but selection committees are looking for some of the same things. Be sure to read the essay directions carefully, as some committees might outline in detail what they are looking for in the essay. Additionally, if the directions need clarification, contact the administrator directly.
- **Pay Attention to Deadlines:** Most scholarships have early deadlines (often before you are accepted to your program).
- **Brainstorm:** Before you start writing, think about the following questions. What topic(s) am I most interested in writing about? What stories or examples from my life best relate to the topic? What academic classes keep me interested? What are my hobbies? What would I do if I had limitless time and means?
- **Show Initiative:** The best way to do this is to contact the scholarship funder or administrator directly. Find out the goals and purpose of the sponsor organization. This will help you keep your essay on topic and relevant. Then, figure out a way to relate your interests to the organization's goals. Many times these are the most creative essays. Maybe your desire to be an international aid worker includes upgrading access to technology in rural areas. Perhaps your proposed career in international business will put you in close contact with environmental issues in urban areas. You can always find a way to relate your interests to the essay's topic.
- **Avoid General Statements:** Statements such as "I really deserve this scholarship" or "I have a great deal of financial need" or "I will be a great ambassador of the U.S." do not explain WHY. Keep in mind

that all students applying for scholarships believe that they deserve a scholarship, so you must provide specific reasons. *Be specific, and provides examples or detailed explanations of why and how you meet the scholarship criteria.* For example, "I have very high financial need because my parent was recently laid off" or "I deserve this scholarship because I work part-time during school and I have been saving for study abroad since high school" or "I deserve this scholarship because my study abroad program directly relates to my future intended career (*continue on to explain how/why*)...."

- **Address Academics and Career Goals:** Make sure to relate your study abroad program to your major/minor, career or other academic goals. Personal goals can also be included, although goals for recreation and travel are not viewed as highly as academic/career goals. Also, if you chose to study in a more expensive location, justify academically/professional why you chose this location.
- **Be Unique:** Many students may have similar backgrounds as you, which means sticking out in a crowd is important, and the essay requirement is the perfect opportunity to do so. It's your chance to show the scholarship selection committee how great you really are, tell them a unique story of personal perseverance, or describe your limitless potential and unmatched determination.
- **Tell Your Story:** Everyone has a story to tell. Your essay can take many forms, from a personal narrative of your past accomplishments to a careful analysis of a quote, favorite author, public policy or important global trend. Whichever form you choose (or the directions require) your goal is to show that you are more thoughtful, creative and dedicated than anyone else. As long as your story answers the essay question the sky's the limit.
- **Be Memorable:** You can do this in two great ways; by being original and by being descriptive. Not only will this perk interest in your story, but it will help make your essay memorable. If you have a unique personal background, tell that. But remember, just because you have a special story or diverse family history doesn't mean you're scholarship worthy. When writing your story be as descriptive and detailed as you can. Don't just tell the selection committee what you're interested in, but what you have done specifically to address that interest.
- **Be Yourself:** Be sure your essay accurately depicts who you are and what you care about. Don't write what you think the selection committee wants to hear.
- **Proof Read:** Pay attention to your sentence structure, spelling, grammar, etc. Poorly written essays will decrease your chance of receiving an award. It is suggested that you have a friend read over your essay to catch mistakes or, better yet, utilize the services at the DU Writing Center: <http://www.du.edu/writing/writingcenter/index.html>.
- **Lastly, Speak with Your OIE Advisor:** Your OIE advisor is a good resource for guidance with your scholarship application and may have input or specific advice for the scholarship.