

10 Tips for Winning College Scholarships

Would you rather spend hours applying for scholarships or years paying off student loan debt? Here are our best tips for finding scholarships and creating the most successful submissions.

1. Apply for local scholarships

Many communities offer local scholarships through clubs, organizations, small businesses, and benefactors. The odds of winning these scholarships are greater because they're open to a smaller group of students. Here's how to find local scholarships:

- Check with your teachers and guidance counselor
- **Xello is a great resource**
- OPSF website, www.olathepublicschoolsfoundation.org

2. There are no scholarships too small to apply for.

Many students look for scholarships that offer the biggest bucks—but those are also the most competitive. Scholarships with smaller awards usually have fewer applicants, so your chances of winning may be higher. These scholarships can help with college costs like books, supplies, and living expenses. Paying off those smaller expenses can quickly add up to big savings. If you spend 2 hours on an application for a \$500 scholarship, that means you earned \$250 an hour for your work. That's a lot better than \$10-\$15 an hour at your college job.

3. Get personal

Make sure that you tell the scholarship judge something about YOU. Help them get to know you. If you love tinkering on motorcycles...share that. If you have been baking since you were 3, share that. If you were the one to bandage up your pets, share that. If your dream is to build your own low-rider car, share that. If you were sick when you were young, and you saw how the doctors or nurses worked miracles and now you want to do that, too....share that.

4. Financial need

Many applications ask the applicant to describe their need. Most kids don't answer this very important question. Financial need looks different for everyone. Don't assume you don't have financial need.

5. Satisfy ALL the requirements

You can write the best essay in the world, but if the prompt asks for a list of five things, and you only list four, you may be disqualified. Make sure you answer every question and accurately meet every requirement.

6. Proofread

Spelling and grammar mistakes may get you disqualified. Make sure to proofread your essay at least twice and ask your parents and friends to look it over, too. The OPSF online scholarship application system does not have a built-in spellcheck option. Copy/paste your essay into a word processing program like Word or Google Docs to spellcheck it there. The more eyes, the better.

7. Submit early

Don't wait until the due date, just in case there's a problem with the site, the Internet connection, or your computer. This also applies to obtaining a copy of your transcript and asking for reference letters. Don't wait until the day before the scholarship is due to ask for these items.

8. Apply for as many scholarships as you can

The tip we hear the most from scholarship winners is to apply for as many scholarships as you can. Treat it like a part-time job and set aside several hours every month to look for and apply for scholarships. You should continue applying for scholarships for as long as you're in school.

9. Don't give up!

If you don't win, don't take it personally, and DON'T GIVE UP! Like most things in life, the most successful scholarship winners are the ones who keep trying. Find scholarships that you're passionate about and keep applying. Good luck!

Tips for Creating your SmarterSelect On-line Application Account with OPSF

Be sure to use an email address you **check often**, this is probably NOT your student email address. You are also encouraged to activate SMS messaging and provide your cell phone number so you can also receive communication via text message.