

## Writing the Scholarship Essay

The scholarship essay is a variation on the Five Paragraph Essay that you probably saw for the first time in fifth grade. It has a basic structure with a little bit of a difference: you need to write with the application specifications in mind.

Some things to consider:

**Tell your story.** But remember to tell that story *in the context of the application*. For example, if the scholarship is for “leaders,” highlight experiences in which you’ve shown leadership qualities, like ability to work with groups and motivate people toward a common goal; good judgment and organization; putting principles and the greater good above one’s self. You may have done this in your volunteer activities, in your dorm, or in your personal life. Give examples. Be honest.

**Remember your audience.** The committee members reading this essay are looking for candidates who best meet the spirit of the donors’ intent. That’s why it’s important to read the application carefully, and *write to the application*. You might also research the donor. His or her background may give you some insights into their motivation for funding the scholarship, and you may be able to speak to that in your essay.

**Be authentic.** Try to write it like you’d say it. Be respectful, but not overly formal. Be yourself, but not overly casual. Strike the right tone. Read this essay out loud several times to some different people—including older people, and get feedback.

**Do several revisions.** Let the essay sit for 48 hours and come back to it and revise.

### The Basic Outline

**First Paragraph:** Introduce yourself and tell in brief, why you feel qualified for the scholarship. Mention hometown and major.

**Second paragraph:** Begin to tell your story in the context of the scholarship. How do your qualities fit the application requirements? Be specific.

**Third paragraph:** A little deeper background. How have you gotten to this point? Have you overcome any obstacles, physical, financial, personal? Don’t go too deeply into a hard luck story, but if you have succeeded against some kind of tough odds, you should mention this. This is also the place to put anything unusual or interesting in your background that might stand out. Here you might also talk about your long-term plans and why, as well as how you came to those goals.

**Fourth paragraph:** How would this scholarship affect your studies? What would it help you do and how would it help you reach your goals?

**Fifth paragraph:** Summarize and reiterate your qualifications and make the committee comfortable with giving you the scholarship. Remember that it makes the committee members look good when they pick a winning candidate who reflects well on the donor and UMass!