

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY[®]

Academic Success Center

**Professional Documents:
Scholarship Essays & Personal
Statements**

Writing & Communication Consultations



- Writing & communication consultations are **free** and includes both virtual and in-person appointment options.
- Consultations use a peer mentoring model and can cover all stages of the composition process and assist with course assignments as well as professional documents.
- For the most up-to-date information, please visit our website:
<https://www.asc.dso.iastate.edu/writingsuccess>

Agenda



- Scholarship essay purpose & audience
 - Typical prompt & formatting expectations
 - Suggestions & evaluating excerpts
- Personal Statement purpose and audience
 - Typical types & approaches
 - Suggestions & evaluating excerpts

Scholarship Essay Purpose



A scholarship essay is your chance to make the case for why you should receive the scholarship. It helps the scholarship provider learn about your academic and personal life.

In response to any scholarship essay question, you should:

- Consider the **purpose**: they want to get to know who you are as a person!
- Highlight the experiences you have, using a confident tone and addressing why they matter (but avoid exaggerating).

Scholarship Prompts & Questions

- Prompts/questions can be general or specific
 - General: *Please give the selection committee an idea of who you are and why you are the perfect candidate for this scholarship.*
 - Specific: *"Describe a book that made a lasting impression on you and your life and why."*
- Can be related to:
 - Personal achievements in your field of study
 - Background influences or future goals
 - Financial need
 - Current events and social issues

(International Student, "Eight Steps," n.d.)

Know Your Audience

- Which organization is providing the scholarship?
 - Does the scholarship provider value: Classroom performance? Community service? Extracurricular activities? Diversity and inclusion?
 - Describe how your interests and values match up with the mission and objectives of the funding organization.

(International Student, "Eight Steps," n.d.)

- Are your readers educated non-specialists or specialists within your academic field?
 - What context do they need to understand your example? What terms or jargon is appropriate?

Understand the Prompt



- Review what the prompt is asking.
 - Prompts may be written as a question or a statement.
Regardless, what is it asking for?
- Simplify by rephrasing the prompt in your own words.
- Take your time understanding all of the prompt by highlighting aspects of the prompt, circling specific words, etc.

(Brown, 2021)

Formatting

Unless otherwise specified, scholarship essays should always:

- be double-spaced.
- use Times New Roman 12-point font.
- have 1-inch margins on all 4 sides.

(International Student, “Sample Scholarship Essays,” n.d.)

Organization

- Narrative essays include elements like a thesis, transitions, and a concluding statement but don’t require a strict 5-paragraph essay format.
- Body paragraphs: Stay focused on the topic but elaborate on each main idea.

(Brown, 2021)

Plan ahead

- Give yourself enough time to research the scholarship provider.
- Brainstorm ideas using notes from the prompt.
- Organize your thoughts into an outline.
- Develop your outline into focused paragraphs.
- Read and revise multiple times.
- Receive feedback.
- Revise and edit.

(International Student, “Eight Steps,” n.d.)

- **Consider: What strategy works best for you as you brainstorm or start writing your draft?**

Be Creative

- Inspire a smile or share a unique perspective.
- Start with a compelling narrative.

✓ *"My mother inspires me because she put her life on the line serving as an essential medical worker during the pandemic."*

✓ *"For months, every morning before the sun rose, Mom rolled quietly out of bed and rushed to the hospital to offer her services and care to those battling the coronavirus."*

(Kerr, 2020)

Make it Personal & Memorable



- Connect with your audience by:
 - Telling stories.
 - Supporting your claims with examples.
 - Illustrating your points with details.
 - Don't forget that this paper should represent the “real” you.

(Kerr, 2020)

Things to Avoid

1. Starting your essay with a quote or simple phrasing like “In this essay,” restating the prompt, and introducing yourself.
2. Writing a research essay (scholarship essays are narrative essays)
3. Rehashing what is already in your resumé
4. Making potentially controversial references (e.g., religious or political)
5. Using the same essay for all applications
6. Exceeding the word limit
7. Redundant conclusions
8. Submitting without editing and proofreading

(International Student, “Eight Steps,” n.d.; Tamara, 2015)

Excerpt 1: Opening



"It is 6 am on a hot day in July and I've already showered and eaten breakfast. I know that my classmates are all sleeping in and enjoying their summer break, but I don't envy them; I'm excited to start my day interning with a local newspaper doing investigative journalism. I work a typical 8-5 day during my summer vacation and despite the early mornings, nothing has made me happier. Although it wasn't clear to me then, looking back on my high school experiences and everything that led to me to this internship, I believe this path began with a particularly savvy teacher and a little book she gave me to read outside of class."

(International Student, "Sample Scholarship Essays," n.d.)

Consider: What are the strengths and areas of improvement?

Excerpt 2: Closing



"This is why I'm applying for this scholarship. Your organization has been providing young aspiring journalists with funds to further their skills and work to uncover the untold stories in our communities that need to be reported. I share your organization's vision of working towards a more just and equitable world by uncovering stories of abuse of power. I have already demonstrated this commitment through my writing in high school and I look forward to pursuing a BA in this field at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor. With your help, I will hone my natural instincts and inherent writing skills. I will become a better and more persuasive writer and I will learn the ethics of professional journalism. I sincerely appreciate the committee's time in evaluating my application and giving me the opportunity to tell my story. I look forward to hearing from you soon."

(International Student, "Sample Scholarship Essays," n.d.)

Consider: What are the strengths and areas of improvement?

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Personal Statements



- A personal statement is a unique opportunity for you to “pitch” yourself to a selection committee.
- Types:
 - **Statement of Purpose:** Focus on your goals for graduate school and beyond.
 - **Research Statement:** Focus on your current research as well as the future direction and potential of your research.
 - Diversity and/or teaching statements may also be requested.

(Office of Postdoctoral Studies, n.d.)

Application Guidelines



- Typically, each organization, department, and/or program has their own application review process.
- Central application sites may include one set of guidelines or may include individualized expectations for different programs.
- Closely follow the application guidelines to determine the specific purpose and type of each personal statement.

Approaches & Forms

Forms

- A comprehensive statement, in which you have freedom to shape the content.
- A response to a certain set of questions, in which you must provide specific information.

Approaches

- You know what you want to work on already (Ex: explain why you want to research at that specific institution).
- You aren't sure (Ex: discuss general areas of medicine that interest you).

Overview



1. Follow the guidelines carefully.
2. Answer all aspects of the prompt.
3. Provide concrete details or examples to support your claims.
4. Use language that demonstrates your ability to be a successful graduate student.
5. If relevant—research and connect to what you know about the specific school, department, program, faculty, etc.
6. Concentrate on the opening paragraph.
7. Get feedback from folks within and outside of your field of study.
8. Give yourself plenty of time to revise.

Potential Questions to Address



1. What are some experiences, personal characteristics, or skills that can help you succeed as a graduate student? How can you demonstrate that you have them?
2. What are your goals for both graduate school and your future career? How can being a part of this program help you achieve these goals?
3. What can you contribute to the program? What will they gain from having you as a student?

(Purdue Online Writing Lab, n.d.)

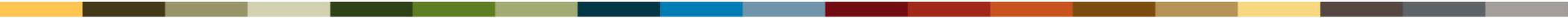
Potential Questions to Address



4. “What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?” “Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (for example, economic, familial, or physical) in your life?”
5. About the field:
 - What has solidified your interest?
 - What have you learned and achieved so far that reinforces this?
4. “Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain?” (Keep this brief, though!)

(Purdue Online Writing Lab, n.d.)

Show (don't tell) Practice



Choose a professional experience or accomplishment (related to your field if possible).

- What context/background is necessary for someone else to understand your experience?
- Why is it significant/important?
- What did you achieve or what were the results of that accomplishment/experience?

Excerpt Example 1



"During summer break of 2009, I worked as a research intern in Dresden, Germany, at the Technical University of Dresden's Institute for Construction Materials. There I performed tests and analyzed data on water vapor and carbon dioxide diffusion rates, as well as rates of capillary water absorption, through fiber- and textile-reinforced concrete specimens of various compositions and developed strains. I also analyzed data obtained by others from combined uniaxial tension and air permeability tests on the same or similar specimens."

(migmefrozen, 2016)

What strengths are present and what improvements could be made?

Excerpt Example 2

"I took a two-term independent study course with Prof. Hoffman on Descartes' theory of the passions and its connection to freedom of the will. I anticipate that the history of modern philosophy will continue to be a central interest of mine, especially early modern philosophers' conceptions of the mind. For example, how is Hume's theory of the passions similar to and different from Descartes'? What is the relationship between mentality and personhood for Locke, Hume, and other philosophers of the era? To what extent was Malebranche occasionalism about causation a development of views already implicit in Descartes?"

(Schwitzgebel, 2007)

What strengths are present and what improvements could be made?

Excerpt Example 3

"In terms of a career, I see myself teaching literature, writing criticism, and going into editing or publishing poetry. Doctoral studies would be valuable to me in several ways. First, your teaching assistant ship program would provide me with the practical teaching experience I am eager to acquire. Further, earning a Ph.D. in English and American literature would advance my other two career goals by adding to my skills, both critical and creative, in working with language. Ultimately, however, I see the Ph.D. as an end in itself, as well as a professional stepping stone; I enjoy studying literature for its own sake and would like to continue my studies on the level demanded by the Ph.D. program."

(Stelzer, n.d.)

What strengths are present and what improvements could be made?

Things to Do



- Have a clear & engaging introduction
- Include a thesis and topic sentences
- Show (don't tell) by being specific and providing evidence
- Tailor to department or program (for central applications, explain why you are applying to that type of program or position)

(Purdue Online Writing Lab, n.d.)

Things to Avoid



- Accomplishments from childhood or even high school
- Controversial statements (e.g., religious or political)
- Sentimental claims or cliches
 - Ex: *"I have always wanted to help other people."*
- Submitting without editing and proofreading

(Purdue Online Writing Lab, n.d.)

Resources



- What have GTAs and/or faculty within your field shared regarding their personal statements?
- What resources does your college career services or program have for you?

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