

What Colleges Look for in Scholarship Essays

Scholarship essays are a student's chance to stand out. Committees want to understand who the student is, what drives them, and how they'll use the opportunity. Here's what they're looking for:

A Clear Story & Authentic Voice

Essays should sound like the student, not a parent or a template. Personal stories that reveal passions or challenges make the essay memorable.

Connection to Goals & Future Impact

Students should show how education will help them reach long-term goals and give back to their community or field.

Character & Values

Committees look for resilience, leadership, creativity, honesty, and perseverance—not just a list of accomplishments.

Evidence of Initiative

Strong essays show initiative through examples: volunteering, projects, jobs, or leadership roles.

Fit With the Scholarship's Mission

Tailor essays to match the scholarship's focus, whether it's leadership, service, academics, or another theme.

Clarity & Strong Writing

Essays should be clear, organized, and free of distracting errors. A good structure is: Hook → Personal Story → What I Learned → Future Plans.

■ Example:

Instead of: "I want to be a nurse because I like helping people."

A stronger essay would say:

"When I helped care for my younger brother after his surgery, I discovered not only how challenging recovery can be, but also how comforting it felt to support someone through it. That experience inspired me to pursue nursing, where I can combine my love of science with my desire to help families through some of their hardest moments."

■ Bottom line: Scholarship committees are investing in potential. They want to feel confident the student will use the award wisely, stay motivated, and make a positive impact in the future.