# Writing a Cover Letter/Personal Essay for a Scholarship\* \*\*

1. *Use your resume as the database for the cover letter or essay.* If you cannot include your resume with the cover letter or essay, as in most scholarship applications, you will need to include all information from your resume in the letter.
2. *Divide the material into specific areas, just as you would in a resume.* These almost always include education, scholarships and awards, work experience and goals. Other categories you may or may not qualify for such as volunteer work, research projects, conference papers or presentations, independent study projects, affiliations, language and skills.
3. *You will need a strong organizing thesis statement or umbrella statement at the beginning in order to indicate the key categories that make you a good candidate.*
4. *Introduce each section with a clear topic sentence, indicating which area you plan to discuss.* They should contain key words to help direct the reader.

* I have always chosen challenging courses, and have an excellent/ very good/ good *academic record*.
* My academic achievement is demonstrated by the *numerous scholarships* I have received both at the high school and university level.
* I have developed strong leadership skills, and know how to interact with a wide variety of other people while *working* several different jobs…
* I have done a fair amount of *community service* including…
* My *independent research projects* have strengthened my skills in laboratory work and developed in me an eye for details.
* *Tutoring* has taught me to work diplomatically and successfully with a wide variety of students.
* *Travel* has played a large role in shaping my view of others and of cultural differences.

1. *Your discussions should be result oriented.* As a result of working at a bank, you value accuracy, efficiency and understand job responsibility.
2. *You should stress the qualities and areas of expertise that make you good candidate for the scholarship.* To do this, refer to the qualifications listed with the scholarship. So, for example, if the committee considers financial need when deciding upon the candidates, make a point of your financial need but not in a tacky way. Committees often look for such things in a candidate as well:
   * Knowledge of chosen field, carefulness of work
   * Motivation, enthusiasm, seriousness of purpose
   * Creativity, originality, ingenuity of problem solving
   * Ability to plan and carry out research, organization
   * Ability to express thought in speech and writing
   * Maturity, emotional stability, ability to withstand stress and face challenges
   * Leadership skills
   * Self-reliance, initiative, independence, adaptability
   * Responsibility
   * Ability to work well with others
   * Growth potential, desire to achieve, dedication to goals
3. You will need a concluding sentence that wraps the letter up and summarizes key strengths.
4. Choice of words is important. Achieve a balance between bragging and modesty. Avoid exaggerations and clichés but do not down play your worth. A list of active word is included, as well.
5. Proofread your letter/essay. Consider grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Avoid wordiness. Be clear and concise.
6. Format the letter as a letter. That means addresses and the date at the top, a greeting (Dear Mrs. Wolf,) a closer (Sincerely,) and a signature above your name in print.
7. Format the essay as an essay. If they’ve asked for an essay, do not submit a letter.

\* More often than not, scholarships only require either a cover letter or personal essay. If only one is required, the body of text and guidelines remain the same but the format is done accordingly. If both are required, think of the cover letter as a small, tight introduction to the personal essay. If a cover letter, personal essay, and resume are required then the cover letter introduces you, the purpose for sending the packet of stuff you’re sending, and gives a brief overview of what to expect in the resume. The personal essay becomes an expansion of the resume as well as a source of information on those things we can’t glean from the resume or cover letter.

\*\* Adapted from “Writing a Cover Letter for a Scholarship.” Maureen Thum, English Department Lecturer, U of M – Flint.

# Tips: What to Do with a Scholarship Application Essay\*

1. *Answer the Question.* Review the question asked by the application. Has the student completely answered it? If not, what additional info needs to be included? How can it be effectively inserted into the text?
2. *Be Original.* Is the essay individual and creative or does it give an unexciting narrative?
3. *Be Individual.* Scholarship officers want to learn about the student and his or her writing ability. Is the essay meaningful and descriptive, about the student’s feelings and not entirely about actions?
4. *Don’t “Thesaurize” the Composition.* Big words used inappropriately make for clunky, unconvincing essays.
5. *Use Imagery and Clear, Vivid Prose.* A lot of students who come to us are not ease with using imagery so it’s up to us to see that all of the reader’s senses are engaged*.*
6. *Spend Most of Your Time on the Introduction.* Expect scholarship officers to spend 1-2 minutes reading the essay. The introduction should grab the reader’s interest from the beginning. Some things to keep in mind:
   * Don’t summarize in the introduction. If you summarize, the scholarship officer need not read the rest of your essay.
   * Create mystery or intrigue in your introduction. It is not necessary or recommended that your first sentence give away the subject matter. Raise questions in the minds of the scholarship officers to force them to read on. Appeal to their emotions to make them relate to your subject matter.
7. *Relate Body Paragraphs to the Introduction.* The introduction can be original but cannot be silly. The paragraphs that follow must relate to the introduction.
8. *Use Transitions.* Applicants continue to ignore transitioning to their own detriment. Use transitions within paragraphs and especially between paragraphs to preserve the logical flow of the essay. Transitions are not limited to phrases like “as a result, in addition, while, since, etc.” but includes repeating key words and progressing the idea. Transitions provide the intellectual architecture to argument building.
9. *Conclude with a bang.* The conclusion is the last chance to persuade or impress the reader. In the conclusion, avoid summary since the essay is usually short to begin with; the reader should not need to be reminded of what was written 300 words before. Also, do not use stock phrases like “in conclusion, in summary, to conclude, etc.”

**Sample Cover Letter Format\***

Fran Fingers

1234 Any Street

Anywhere, Anystate 12345

(123) 867-5309

October 5, XXXX

Bonnie Blum Memorial Scholarship Selection Committee

5678 Any Street

Anyhwere, Anystate 12345

Members of the Selection Committee:

Opening: Houses the reason for the letter, the specifics of your application, umbrella statement for rest of letter.

First Paragraph: Topic Sentence, discussion of one of areas mentioned earlier (education for example) briefly or in depth depending on accompaniment of personal essay and/or resume.

Second Paragraph: Transition, topics sentence, discussion of new point.

Third Paragraph: See second.

Fourth Paragraph: See third. Eventually you will run out of new points to discuss. You will then make the transition into a closing paragraph.

Closing: Often times it’s easy to transition from your goals to a summation of the letter. Do not use the same wording as the opener. Thank the committee for considering your letter.

Sincerely,

Signature

Fran Fingers

\* Adapted from “Guidelines for Cover Letter.” CDC, U of M - Flint

**Sample Essay/Cover Letter 1**

I am applying for the Ralph M. and Emmalyn E. Freeman Honors Scholar Program Scholarship. Presently, I am a junior in the nursing program. I believe my chosen profession will enable me to fulfill all of my desires to help others, to continuously expand my knowledge base and skills and to travel the world. Throughout my life I have participated in extracurricular activities including valuable volunteer experiences. I have striven for academic excellence, always wishing to make the most of my education. In addition, I have managed to work to provide for some of the basic expenses that students have. Next year this will especially important, as I will no longer be receiving the Chancellor Scholarship.

Education has always been an important aspect of my life. While in high school I managed to take challenging courses such as advanced placement English and calculus, physics, and chemistry. I enjoyed the arts and was involved in art, band, and choir. Despite the time consuming practices for concerts, parades, musicals and exhibits, I was able to maintain a 3.97 grade point average, allowing me to graduate as salutatorian. I decided to sty near home and come to the University of Michigan-Flint because of the smaller class size, scholarship monies and the University’s Honor Program.

I have received many scholarships since I began my college career. In 1998 I received the Chancellor’s Scholarship providing me with $1,700 per year for four years. I also received three scholarships from my graduating high school. The first was the Goodrich Alumni Scholarship totaling $200. The second was the Goodrich Teachers Scholarship totaling $500. The last was from the National Honor Society and totaled $260. All of these awards were given based on scholarship and community service. Because of my acceptance in the University’s Honor Program I also receive the Honor’s Scholarship. Despite the challenges of both the nursing and honors curriculum I have managed to maintain a 3.7 grade point average. My efforts did not go unnoticed and in 2001 I received two additional scholarships including the Ralph M. and Emmalyn E. Freeman Honors Scholar Program Scholarship and the Ralph M. And Emmalyn E. Freeman Long Distance Learning Scholarship. These accomplishments lead me to believe that in the future I will continue to perform at a high level in the academics.

Although education plays a significant role in my life, I am involved with many other activities. During high school I was an active member of the National Honor Society for two and a half years. My last year as a member gave me the opportunity to play a more active role as I participated as NHS treasurer. I frequently tutored individuals by offering my time before and after school for middle and high school students. I enjoy helping others with schoolwork and have continued to aid fellow students at the college level. I also enjoy the arts and participated in many performances, plays, musicals and exhibitions, often requiring traveling to other areas and interacting with new individuals. Currently I am involved with fellow nursing students on a class and university level. I belong to the National Student Nurses Association as well. I have volunteered my time to inform individuals of various ages of what nursing involves and share the need for nurses. IN addition, I have entered the community to perform blood pressure screening and offer information to those at risk for hypertension and diabetes. I have increased my knowledge base as well as my public presentation skills by presenting one of my papers, Beatrice and Katharine: Shakespeare’s Unconventional Women at the Purdue University-Calumet Undergraduate Research Conference in 1999. Through all of these experiences I have learned to act as a leader, work in groups, and organize my time appropriately.

In addition to school related activities I am also involved with my local church. I teach a class of 3-6 year old kids. When other teachers are unable to teach Sunday school I do not hesitate to come to their aid. I have participated in church cleanup, nursery duty and choir as well. I feel that by aiding in church related activities I am setting a positive example for the children within the church to follow.

Work is also a part of my life. Until recently, I would work 16-20 hours/week to provide for educational expenses. Presently I work 8 hours/week in the neonatal intensive care unit as an extern at Hurley Medical Center. I enjoy working because I am able to see newborns progress to a state where they can finally be discharged to their families. I enjoy teaching parents about their infants such as what to expect, what is normal for their infant to do and when to call the doctor. During the summer of 2001 I worked in a group of three other individuals to perform a quality improvement project on gavage fed infants and then presented the results to our peers. Through my work experiences I have learned a little more about what to expect upon completion of the nursing program and now know the reality of what to expect as a registered nurse. Seeing problems such as mandatory overtime and poor benefits despite a nursing shortage has motivated me to remain active in associations such as the Student Nursing Association because I realize that as a group we will be able to voice our concerns about the issues that nurses face today.

My goal is to become a registered nurse so that I can perform task that clients cannot do for themselves as well as be an active listener, patient advocate and educator. At some point I would enjoy going back to school to become a practitioner. I have had an extraordinary number of nursing instructors who were absolutely wonderful and would one day like to give back what they have given to me by becoming an instructor. I know that one day I will provide something meaningful to the individuals that I encounter.

**Sample Essay/Cover Letter 2**

I wish to apply for the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ scholarship. I believe that my excellent academic record, and service work make me a good candidate for a scholarship. Throughout high school I maintained a high level of academic achievements while volunteering for community service and working 20 hours a week. I graduated from Owosso high school as the Salutatorian of my class in 1999. I had a 3.99 GPA. In addition to my academic classes, such as AP English and Physics, I was a member of the A capella Choir. This demanded extra time and effort especially before the concerts in December, March and May during which our director held extra practices at night and on the weekends.

Not only was I involved with academic and extra curricular activities; I also worked in a pizza restaurant approximately 20 hours a week. After two years, I was promoted to a key holding position where I am still working today. I supervise the other employees, handle customer complaints and close the building at night. This employment has taught me much about myself and others. I have learned what it means to work hard and how to motivate other to do the same thing.

At the University of Michigan-Flint, I applied and was one of twenty students from a total of seventy applicants t enter the honors program. In addition, I was awarded the Distinguished Chancellor Scholarship, Michigan Competitive Scholarship and Honors Program Scholarship. These resources have made my college experiences possible. I am working towards a degree in elementary education with concentration in mathematics and language arts.

I have continued to maintain an excellent academic record of academic achievement with a GPA of 3.93, while working thirty five to forty five hours a week to finance my education. Presently, I work at Fred Meyer Jewelers, Mancino’s Pizza and Grinders, and as a Supplemental Instructor (SI) for Business Calculus. From this wide range of experiences I have gained a broad background of life. I enjoy working with and for people. I have learned from being an SI leader how to explain things in several different ways and not to give up until the student truly understands the material.

In addition to my employment I also continue to volunteer for community service. I assist in a kindergarten class every Wednesday. I have tied shoes; put on name tags, sang songs and helped the children make apple muffins. I help the teacher with lessons, art projects, supervising during “play time,” testing and many other aspects of the career I hope to have one day. It is the most rewarding experience at this pointing in my life. I love children. Watching them grow and learn is one of my greatest joys.

I also give some of my time to the children at my church. I am the leader of the puppet team there. I organize outings, performances and competitions for about fifteen children between the ages of eleven and sixteen. I conduct practice for two hours every Saturday in which the puppeteers learn more about puppetry and practice songs and skits for upcoming performances. I chose the material and make decisions about who gets which part. Dedication and commitment are two of the traits that have been developed in me through this experience.

After graduation I hope to become an elementary school teacher. I am committed to this goal as is evident by my record of academic accomplishments and community service. I am convinced that all these factors make me a good candidate for this scholarship.

**Sample Essay/Cover Letter 3**

My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and I am applying for the Ralph M. and Emmalyn E. Freeman Philosophy Scholarship. Presently, I am a senior working towards a Bachelor’s degree in Philosophy and English with a specialization in writing. Despite being a full time student, balancing two majors, maintaining a 3.8 GPA, and working over 30 hours a week, I also take the initiative to enhance my education outside the classroom. I constantly strive for excellence and am committed to making my time as an undergraduate as productive and beneficial as possible.

A well-rounded student, my interests span across curriculum and culture. I’ve thirsted for knowledge since childhood, and when I finally reached high school, my craving was further whetted. I finished fifth grade in the United States before moving to Bethlehem, Palestine. There, in my parent’s homeland, I completed the next 4 years of my education. Consequently, I attended my first year of high school in an Arabic school. Although I did exceedingly well there, ranking seventh amongst my classmates, my family relocated to Grand Blanc, MI before I began tenth grade. Regardless of the radical shift in culture and educational systems, I excelled in my new setting. I graduated from Grand Blanc High School in January 2000, a semester early, with a 3.81 GPA and ranking 38th out of a class of 468.

Attending college liberated me and allowed me to not only explore a wider array of subjects, including women, gender and feminist studies, but also explore myself. I grew into a strong woman, questioning the status quo and doing all I can to change injustices I find. My development was aided by the Michigan Competitive Scholarship (since Fall 2002) and consistently acknowledged by the University of Michigan-Flint Scholar Award (for every semester at U of M – Flint except Fall 2000).

My personal achievements exceed beyond school, however. I work roughly 30 hours a week, spread liberally over two jobs. The first is as a cashier for Bernie’s Market. I’ve learned to work with others through this experience and it has shaped me into a responsible adult. As Bernie’s is a family business, I often open and close the market, work with suppliers, track purchase and sales, in addition to hands-on jobs like stocking shelves.

The second is as head tutor in the Marian E. Wright Writing Center. I am responsible not only for tutoring developmental writers enrolled in ENG 109 and students wanting one-on-one appointments for any subject, in any stage of writing but also supervise the day-to-day operations of the center. I monitor scheduling and budget, organize and lead meetings, plan

and execute workshops, and overall keep the writing center running smoothly for the benefit of fellow tutors and students. Currently, I’m also voluntarily involved in planning the 11th Annual Michigan Writing Centers Ideas Exchange with my co-workers, manager and director. I’ve also helped revise the syllabus for the center’s tutor training course. After its revisions, I worked with the center’s director and fellow staff to carry out the revisions in the actual classroom. My work in the center is extremely gratifying both on the personal and professional level. I take pleasure in watching my students discover and rediscover writing. Furthermore, their success inspires me to delve into my own work regularly.

In that avenue, I spend what little spare time I have writing and revising poetry for submission to contests and various publications. I’m also in the process of assembling a work tentatively titled “Fabulous Feminism” which I intend to be an introductory guide to feminism in all its faces. To do this, I’m drawing on my experience from Spring and Summer 2002 in which I created the “Road Guide to Working in the Writing Center,” an instructional manual for all incoming tutors. Over the upcoming spring, summer and fall, I’m working with the help of Dr. Jami Anderson to begin and complete my senior thesis concerning feminist ethics. In the past, I attended two Writing Center conferences including the 9th Annual Michigan Writing Centers Ideas Exchange and the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing/Midwest Writing Centers Association Conference 2002, for which I was a presenter.

Behind my achievements is a strong desire to learn. I hope to complete my Bachelor’s degree over the next year and attend graduate school so I can one day return the favor many professors bestowed on me and teach at a college level. Philosophy has taught me to evaluate life and my experience. It’s through that that I hope to become an instrumental member of society, using all of my energies to bring about constructive change and create a path to the “good life,” not only for myself but also for others.

I would like to thank you in advance for considering my application.

**Top Ten Mistakes Made on Scholarship Applications**

By Laura DiFiore

1. Forget to include your name and/or address! You would be surprised how many students do not include their name or address on an application!
2. Submit an incomplete application. Make sure you include all required references, photos, transcripts, and essays.
3. Be rude or abusive to the judges. Telling the judges that they will burn in Hades if they don’t pick don’t pick you, or that they are idiots because they don’t accept applications from students in your major is a sure-fire way to guarantee you will NOT be considered for this application, and that the judges will tell all their judge friends how nasty you are.
4. Submit a dirty application. Use a plate for your lunch, not your application. Don’t spill beer on your application!
5. Apply when you do not meet their minimum requirements. If they require a minimum 3.0 GPA and you have a 1.2 GPA, don’t waste your time!
6. Send it “postage due.” Oops!
7. Mail the envelope but forget to out the application in it. Surprisingly common!
8. Submit inappropriate supporting documentation, such as including a picture of you at age 6 months when the application asks for you to include a photo, or including a copy of your arrest record as a reference! (This really happened!)
9. No one can read your application. The use of fancy, hard to read script typefaces on your essay pr handwriting that even a doctor would be ashamed of.
10. Spelling errors! Even ONE spelling error can doom your application! Remember, if you do not take the time to spell-check your application, the judges won’t take the time to read it!

**Action Words\***

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| Accelerated  Accomplished  Achieved  Acquired  Activated  Adapted  Addressed  Administrated  Advised  Allocated  Analyzed  Anticipated  Applied  Appointed  Appraised  Approved  Arranged  Assessed  Assisted  Assigned  Attained  Audited  Augmented  Averted  Avoided  Broadened  Built  Calculated  Centralized  Clarified  Collaborated  Combined  Completed  Composed  Conceived  Concluded  Condensed  Conducted  Consolidated  Constructed  Contributed  Controlled  Converted  Corrected  Created  Cultivated | Decentralized  Decreased  Defined  Delegated  Delivered  Demonstrated  Designed  Determined  Developed  Devised  Directed  Discharged  Discovered  Documented  Distributed  Doubled  Earned  Edited  Effected  Eliminated  Employed  Enforced  Engineered  Established  Estimated  Evaluated  Examined  Exceeded  Executed  Exercised  Expanded  Expedited  Extended  Extracted  Facilitated  Financed  Forecast  Formed  Formulated  Found  Founded  Framed  Fulfilled  Generated  Guided  Handled | Headed  Helped  Hired  Identified  Implemented  Improved  Improvised  Influenced  Initiated  Inspected  Installed  Inspired  Instigated  Instituted  Integrated  Instructed  Interpreted  Interviewed  Introduced  Invented  Invested  Investigated  Launched  Lectured  Led  Lightened  Liquidated  Located  Made  Maintained  Managed  Marketed  Mediated  Minimized  Mobilized  Modernized  Modified  Monitored  Motivated  Negotiated  Obtained  Operated  Ordered  Organized  Originated  Overcame  Oversaw | Participated  Performed  Pinpointed  Pioneered  Planned  Prepared  Presented  Processed  Procured  Produced  Projected  Programmed  Promoted  Proposed  Provided  Proved  Published  Purchased  Realized  Recommended  Reconciled  Recruited  Redesigned  Reduced  Re established  Regulated  Reinforced  Rejected  Relate  Re negotiated  Reorganized  Reported  Represented  Researched  Reshaped  Resolved  Restored  Revamped  Reviewed  Revised  Revitalized  Revived  Saved  Scheduled  Secured  Selected  Set up | Settled  Shaped  Showed  Simplified  Sold  Solved  Sorted  Sponsored  Staffed  Standardized  Stimulated  Started  Streamlined  Strengthened  Stretched  Structured  Studied  Suggested  Summarized  Supervised  Supported  Surpassed  Surveyed  Sustained  Tailored  Taught  Terminated  Tested  Tightened  Traded  Trained  Transacted  Transferred  Transformed  Translated  Trimmed  Tripled  Uncovered  Undertook  Unified  Used  Utilized  Verified  Vitalized  Widened  Won  Wrote |

\*Compiled by Cooperative Education and Career Center, U of M – Flint