

Tips for Writing a Successful Scholarship Application

Based on the event: “Tips on writing a great scholarship application” held by the HSGSF

Answers courtesy of the panel including:

- Dr Brian Coombes, Professor in the Department of Biochemistry and Biomedical Sciences
- Dr. Lori Burrows, Professor and Associate Chair in Biochemistry and Biomedical Science
- Mary Sourial, PhD student MiNDs program

1. What makes a scholarship application stand out?

- Good reference letter: *Make sure to choose someone who knows you. The best reference letters are those in which the referee can provide specific concrete examples of things you have done which exemplify certain characteristics (creativity, independence, leaderships, critical thinking). It is helpful to provide referees with your CV as well as a summary of the qualities/experiences that you would like them to exemplify. Academic referees are the best, as it is rare to see non-academic references. However, if you do choose one they should speak about qualities that make you a good scientific researcher*
- Make it an enjoyable read
- Edit it well, starting with enough time so that you can re-read and send to others for review
- For the section of the application in which you discuss your project proposal, make sure to describe it in your own words; do not be afraid to speak in the first person
- Research experience is one of the most important factors – highlight publications, conferences, abstracts etc. that you have

2. What kind of leadership/volunteer experiences are good?

- Volunteer experiences are not the most important aspect – i.e. it doesn't make you stand out. However, if you can use a volunteer experience to demonstrate a quality that makes you a good scientific researcher then it should be highlighted in your application
- What really differentiates people are experiences that contribute to productivity in science
- If an experience has nothing to do with the scholarship/what the scholarship implies (i.e. research, potential for research etc) then do not waste too much time explaining it

3. Common mistakes

- Waiting until the last minute – most people cannot write their best when they are rushed
- Editing mistakes
- Spelling mistakes – do not make them, they indicate a lack of attention to detail and will stand out in a negative way
- Choosing a reference who doesn't know more about you than how you are in a classroom (i.e good grades, asks good questions, on time etc.=unimportant)

4. Advice for students who don't have a strong publication history

- Those who have publications and other indications that they have contributed to research (i.e conferences, abstracts) are favoured over those who do not
- Find opportunities to present your work – i.e local seminars/conference meetings
- Exemplify qualities that demonstrate your potential as a researcher

5. Order in which an application is reviewed by a panel: CV>Reference letter> Statement of Purpose/Outline of Proposed Research

Always give referees enough time (**at least 2 weeks notice**) and provide them with important details - such as what is the scholarship looking for? Eg: Research productivity and leadership. Pull out things from your CV that highlight these features and write a short paragraph and provide it to the referee so that they have something to work with. Don't just give them application deadline and a form. Provide them with something to work with. Getting good references is not just up to the referee. It is also your job to provide the referee with important details that the scholarship is looking for.

Remember everything is about science, your research potential> include things like volunteering for a science fair, volunteering in a lab, etc. what you learned? How will you use this skill in the research you will conduct in the future? Take some free time and ask question such as why am I doing this? Take time to reflect on your activity. Good thinking=good application, so really take time to think through the logic as to why you did certain volunteering and leadership and spin it in a way such that it will help you become a better researcher and a better leader.