

Take a Write...

... and create a scholarship cover letter that will make you a standout!

By Grace Blum

Type it carefully.

Your letter should look professional and attractive to the reader's eye. Be neat, concise, and follow the conventions of business letters. (Use a business style manual if necessary.)

Be concise

Include things about yourself that may not be in the application, but make sure what you include is both pertinent and brief.

Include goals.

List three or four things you want to accomplish with your education and life ahead. This lets the admissions office know more about you. Be realistic, but show imagination.

Sell it with language.

Briefly describe yourself, using words like "motivated," "responsible," and "goal-oriented." This shows that you know what it takes to be a leader. But, don't go overboard with adjectives. Verbs and nouns are just as important – be and do what you say.

Write actively.

In telling about things you've done, use action verbs rather than passive ones. Be detailed without being wordy.

Personalize each letter.

Do not send out form letters. A personalized letter – one aimed at a particular person – shows you really care about receiving a scholarship. You can trace the person who will read it by calling ahead or checking a Web site. Get the correct title, too. Is it Mrs. or Ms? (And make sure you spell the name correctly.)

Use only one page.

If your cover letter is longer than a page it runs the risk of not being read – or could be read less carefully. Ideally, your cover letter should be three to four artfully-written paragraphs.

What NOT To Put in a Cover Letter

Do not give personal information.

The people reading your letter want to know a little bit about yourself and your goals, but they do not need to know that you want to get married, have three children and live in the suburbs. Keep the letter pertinent to college preparation.

Do not lie or embellish.

The admissions office can tell when someone is not telling the truth – or can find ways of checking your facts. Don't take the risk of ruining your reputation with dishonest approaches to your college education. Such fudging can follow you for years. Give the facts about your accomplishments and your goals, and let them speak for themselves.

Do not include negative information.

This should be obvious, but never put in a scholarship cover letter something that puts you in a negative light. You can describe your best qualities in ways that are not misleading or dishonest. Do that, and guard your integrity in the process.