

Common Errors When Submitting A Scholarship Application

1. Do not submit an incomplete application. Even forgetting one part of a multi-part document will disqualify you. Do not fill in N/A or none. An incomplete application is as good as **NO** application.
2. Make sure that you meet the eligibility criteria. For example, if an application says you need to obtain a degree in a specific time frame, make sure you will do so. The instructions are specific – eligibility criterion is different for each scholarship. For All-USA, students must obtain an associate degree and/or transferring to a four year college (with a minimum of 36 credits by 12/1/2015 or a minimum of 48 credits by 8/31/2016).
3. When writing an essay, be sure to FOCUS your essay. If you are asked to write about one significant endeavor, do not write about several different endeavors. You may have a word limit – do not use it writing a small amount about a lot of things you did! Take one endeavor and show how you applied your education to benefit the school, community or society. Show originality. Be Specific! Show how it is original. Show how you were creative. Show how you used your education. Show how you left an impact and your school or community was left better off once you'll be gone.
4. Review your transcript. Make sure you know how many credits you've completed, how many of those courses are remedial/development, your GPA and number of withdrawals. Remember that in academically rigorous applications, withdrawals may count against you. Do not shy away from difficult courses, especially math & science as this may separate you from others.
5. Do not embellish your story. In prestigious scholarships, you do not want to lie on your application (even a little white lie). For example, ALL USA applicants go through a rigorous screening process by USA TODAY. Even the smallest thing can cause your application to be disqualified. If you win, there will be a THOROUGH check of all information you include in your application. Do not "fudge" facts. Be certain you can back up anything you put in your application. In addition, do not submit any information if you do not want it to become public knowledge. Many applications, especially national or extremely rigorous, may be made available to the media.
6. Not submitting transcripts from all schools. We require transcripts from EVERY school you have attended in the last 5 years. If they are over 5 years old, you do not need to submit them. However, check your current transcript – does it show that you transferred credits? If those credits do not show when they were taken, submit a transcript. Read the directions of the application – it is always better to err on the side of too many transcripts than not enough.

7. Haste makes waste! Applications filled out and submitted close to the deadline are usually incomplete, and you will not have enough time to create and edit several drafts. Applications also need to be RECEIVED (not postmarked) by the deadline – so you run the risk of not even getting it in at all. Take your time to fill out applications, be aware of the deadline and give yourself PLENTY of time to complete them. Start planning NOW what you'll be doing next year. Human nature is to delay until the last minute. You do not want to be 1 of 500 people attempting to access a scholarship website a few hours before the deadline – odds are that you will have trouble accessing what you need or the system will be too slow with so many people trying to do that exact thing. Remember, if you snooze, you lose!
8. Be certain to provide a phone number or an email that will follow you over several months.
9. Do not play low by writing about your sob story. While it's true that a person who has overcome much has an impressive story, it's not enough to win. You need the grades, you need the service learning and you need to adequately write about your endeavor. **It is impressive when people overcome terrible challenges, but at the same time, judges are more impressed with the quality and nature of your significant endeavor.** If you have a good "story" but do not have the academic rigor, endeavor or involvement to back it up, your application will not be competitive.
10. Letters of recommendation need to support what you write. Your letter of recommendation about your endeavor is almost as important as the essay you write about. Choose people that KNOW you and can provide specific and pertinent information! Explain the criteria of the award. Give recommenders ample time to compose your letter. Remember to send thank-you letters after.
11. REVIEW AND PROOFREAD, PROOFREAD, PROOFREAD!!! Simple mistakes usually mean the judges will not consider your application. **There are several on-line proofreading sites that will check spelling and grammar use, among others.**