

Understanding Scholarships

What Are Scholarships?

Scholarships award money for college to students who meet certain qualifications. Most scholarships don't involve large amounts of money, but they can really make a difference for many students. Furthermore, scholarships are not just for straight-A students; plenty of them have other qualifications you might meet. It's worth it to look for scholarships to help pay for college beyond what you are likely to receive in financial aid. But don't count on scholarships as your sole source of funding.

Scholarships Offered by Colleges

Many colleges offer merit scholarships to their incoming freshmen. These scholarships can be based on your academic performance in high school or some other type of achievement, such as being active in student government or community service.

In most cases you are automatically considered for these scholarships when you apply for admission, but sometimes you have to apply for them separately. You'll need to check with the colleges you are interested in to see what's required.

Scholarships from Other Sources

In addition to merit scholarships awarded by colleges to their incoming students, you can apply independently for scholarships available from other sources. They can come from government agencies or national organizations, such as the American Red Cross. Some come from private foundations or local businesses and service organizations. Most of these scholarships can be used at any college or university, which is why they are sometimes called "portable"—they can be "carried" to any school a student decides to attend.

WORDS FOR SUCCESS

scholarships types of financial aid that are usually based on merit or performance and that do not have to be repaid

WORK ZONE

In the spaces provided below and on the next page, enter the personal characteristics that might qualify you for a scholarship.

Scholarship Matchmaker

State of Residence: _____

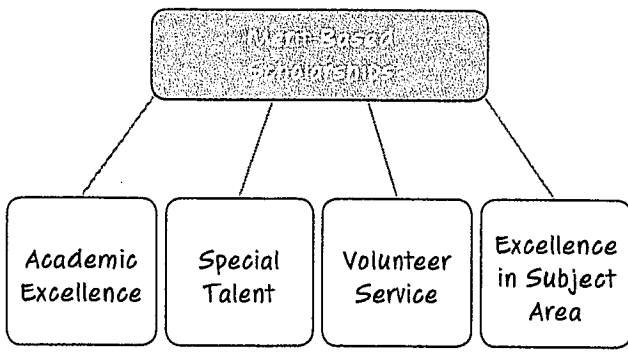
Minority Status: (e.g., African American, Alaskan Native) _____

Nationality or Ethnic Background: (e.g., Chinese, Greek) _____

Religious Affiliation: _____

Organizations/Associations: (e.g., Kiwanis, Rotary, or Elks Club you or a family member belongs to) _____

Employers/Corporations: (e.g., companies you or a family member works for) _____



What Do They Require?

Although these scholarships make up only about 8 percent of total available financial aid, they are still worth looking for. Usually a showing of academic merit is required, but often they are based on different qualifications, such as your place of residence or the course of study you plan to pursue. Some scholarships are set up specifically for certain minorities or students who have a particular ethnic or religious background. And some scholarships are given in exchange for a commitment of service after college, such as those offered by the armed forces through the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program.

Where Do You Look?

Scholarships don't come looking for you; you have to find the ones for which you might qualify. It will take some effort but there are people who can help and tools you can use. It's best to start in the spring of your junior year because it will take some time.

Start Locally

Local businesses and organizations often sponsor scholarships for hometown students. The amounts are usually in the hundreds, not thousands—but your chances of receiving an award are much higher than they are for the big national competitions.

Your high school counselor's office is a great place to start the search for local scholarships. You can also head to your local library, check bulletin boards around town and ask your parents, guardians or neighbors if their workplace sponsors any scholarship opportunities.

Use the Web

There are several great websites that provide scholarship search programs, such as the one on the College Board's website. You begin a scholarship search by completing a questionnaire to identify your educational goals and achievements, talents and personal background. The more criteria about yourself you can provide, the more likely the program will find scholarships that match.

Scholarship Matchmaker

Family Military Service: (Name all family members who are now or have been in the military. Include branch of service.)

Major or Career Interest: (List all college majors or careers you are considering.)

Learning or Physical Disability: _____

Gender: _____

How Do You Apply?

Many scholarship applications have common requirements. Besides the application form itself, they usually ask for a high school transcript, some letters of recommendation and a personal statement or essay. Some scholarships ask for evidence of leadership, patriotism, depth of character, desire to serve or financial need.

Other scholarships are task specific, which means they ask you to do something. Examples of task-specific scholarships would include writing an essay about a specific topic, giving a speech or designing and building a model.

Know the Deadlines

Scholarships are competitive, so deadlines are important. If your application is late, it will be rejected. Most application deadlines are in January, but many are sooner. That's why it is a good idea to start looking for scholarships early. You'll also need to give yourself time to prepare a complete, competitive application.

What Else Do You Need to Know?

Scholarships are gift-aid that you do not have to repay and are often prestigious. However, sometimes they have conditions you must meet.

Here are some questions you should ask about any scholarships you are offered:

"What do I have to do to keep my scholarship?"

Some scholarships require a minimum grade point average (GPA) during each semester of college.

"Do I have to do anything more than maintain satisfactory grades?"

There could be a community service requirement involved. Some scholarships might ask you to submit your grades when you receive a grade report. If the scholarship comes from a local organization, you might be asked to attend a meeting and give a short oral report.

"Is the scholarship renewable?"

In order to help you budget, you will want to know if the money will be there for all four years or just the first one. You'll also want to know if the renewal is automatic or if you need to do something to keep the funds coming.

"If I win a scholarship, what happens to my financial aid?"

If your financial aid award meets your full need, the college will reduce the award by the amount of your scholarship. However, that reduction will most likely be applied to the self-help portion of your aid package—loans and work-study—rather than to grants. But if your full need has not been met—that is, if there's a "gap" in your financial aid award—your scholarship can be used to fill that gap. That will make the college much more affordable.

WORK ZONE

Write a paragraph explaining how you will use your personal characteristics in the Scholarship Matchmaker to look for scholarships. Identify the characteristics that you think sound most promising, and what resources you will use to find scholarships that match.

My Scholarship Search Plan

Blank area for writing the My Scholarship Search Plan.

Don't Be Fooled

Dishonest people sometimes try to take advantage of young people searching for scholarships. Scammers will steal personal information and even money by using the promise of funds for college. The U.S. Federal Trade Commission developed "Project \$cholar\$cam" to alert students and families about potential scams and how to recognize them. Here are some warning signs to look out for:

"The scholarship is guaranteed or your money back."

No one can make such a guarantee, and refunds often have strings attached.

"You can't get this information anywhere else."

Legitimate scholarships are not kept secret.

"I just need your credit card or bank account number to hold this scholarship."

Never give out this information to anyone calling you. It may be a setup for identity theft.

"We'll do all the work."

Don't be fooled. You must do the work of finding and applying for scholarships yourself.

"This scholarship will cost money."

Don't pay anyone who claims to be "holding" a scholarship for you.

"You've been selected by a national foundation" or "You're a finalist in a competition."

If you don't recognize the name of the foundation and never applied for the competition, it's a scam.

Go to the **WORK ZONE**

DID YOU KNOW?

Almost every state offers scholarships to state residents attending colleges within the state.

Based on what you have learned in Lessons 1 and 2, use the chart below to compare and contrast the differences and similarities between scholarships and other types of financial aid. Which do you think will be the primary source of money to help you pay for college? Why?

Scholarships	Other Financial Aid	Most Likely to Help Me