

What should you leave out of your scholarship essay?

- “ **Inspirational quotes.** Who doesn’t love an inspirational quote?! We sure do. Whether you find them scrolling Instagram or keep them tacked up above your desk, a great quote can be super empowering. But when it comes to scholarship essays, it’s better to leave them out.
- “ Do not drop in **famous quotes**, many of which are overused. For example: “Mahatma Gandhi said to ‘be the change you wish to see in the world’ which is why I’m applying for this scholarship. I want to go to college so I can become a nurse and change the world.” Here’s the thing: wanting to be a nurse is incredibly admirable in its own right! It doesn’t have to be attached to anyone else’s sweeping statements about life or humanity. This essay is about *you*, so famous quotes are just a distraction.
- “ **Cliché stories or themes.** Clichés are phrases, stories, or themes that are overused to the point that they lose their power and meaning and they’ll definitely weaken your scholarship essay.
- “ **Do not discuss the scholarship opportunity in platitudes** like, “It would mean the world to me to win this money” or “Winning this scholarship would be life-changing.” These statements may be true, but they don’t really tell us much about you.
- “ **Do not simply share a story about yourself that paint you as a down-on-your-luck student who could have it all if ONLY you won this scholarship money.** Here’s what this might look like: “I’ve never really won anything in life: no contests, giveaways, or competitions. But if I win this scholarship and save money on college, I’ll be able to buy a house, travel the world, and become the youngest Supreme Court Justice in American history.” Don’t get us wrong, we’re all about dreaming

BIG! But when it comes to scholarship essays, we want to help you to avoid falling into cliché narratives that dampen the power of your story and hurt your chances of winning.

- “ **Don’t be too vague or unrealistic.** Be *authentic* and *specific* when talking about yourself, your background, and your aspirations. Focus on *one* primary goal that you’ll be better able to attain if you win the scholarship money. For example: “As a Spanish double major, I would love the opportunity to study abroad in Madrid to immerse myself in the culture and become fluent in Spanish. Winning this scholarship money would help fund my semester overseas.”

- “ **Overly general phrases and platitudes.** The name of the game for winning scholarships is *standing out* from the mix. This means you don’t want to say the exact same thing as hundreds of other applicants. *Platitudes* are super common, overly simplified statements that people use all the time. For example, “Good things come to those who wait.” These are okay phrases to say, but refrain from using them in your scholarship essays to avoid sounding like everyone else.

- “ Do not use any **profanity or curse words**, even if they’re common turn of phrases that we hear all the time on TV and in the real world. For example, try not to say things like: “I’ve worked my ass off for 18 years and now I am ready to apply myself even further in this rigorous pre-med program.” Will you actually offend anyone with that kind of conversational tone? Probably not. But it’s better to be safe than sorry, and we know you can be more creative than that!

- “ **Text speak.** We realize that texting is the way of the world and we’re all pretty accustomed to abbreviating words and using acronyms daily (smh and lol-ing about how common this language is now). But keep your text speak in your group chats and out of your scholarship essays.

