

## Scholarship Letter Writing

### Lesson 1: Brainstorming

**Time Required:** 40 minutes

**Materials:** **Brainstorm Your Ideas** student reproducible 2 (PDF), **Outline Your Essay** student reproducible 1 (PDF), pen

**Directions:**

1. Review the qualities of *anecdotal writing* with students (autobiographical writing using vivid, specific detail that focuses on one important event). If possible, review examples of anecdotal writing from newspaper columns, memoirs, or autobiographies.
2. Distribute **Brainstorm Your Ideas Student Reproducible 2** and read the introduction together. Give students 10 minutes to complete section “A.” Then discuss what was easy, challenging, fun, or unexpected about responding to the prompts.
3. Explain to students that scholarship and college essay topics are often broad; it’s challenging to respond in 500 words, but the use of key words can help. As a class, make a list of the key words in each concept or idea on **Brainstorm Your Ideas Student Reproducible 2**. Together, discuss why these particular words are “key” (allow for a wide range of answers, encourage a particular type of answer, etc.).
4. Provide five minutes each for students to complete sections “B” and “C.” Discuss students’ reactions between each section.
5. Distribute **Outline Your Essay Student Reproducible 1**. Instruct students to use the outlining tool and what they have learned about brainstorming to outline an essay on the topic provided.

**Other brainstorming ideas:**

Instruct students to try writing a college essay in a journal format: Students can set aside 5–10 minutes a day to write about topics that are related to the question. At the end of a week or two, they should easily be able to cull material for the body of a strong personal essay from the journal entries.

Encourage students to interview other people if they’re having trouble deciding how to answer a question. In listening to responses, students will discover their own opinions in relation to them, deciding whether their feelings are similar or different.

## Lesson 2: Overcoming Writer's Block

**Time Required:** 40 minutes

**Materials:** **Overcome Writer's Block** student reproducible 3 (PDF), pen

### Directions:

1. Ask students: *How many of you have experienced writer's block? What is that experience like? What are some strategies you use to deal with writer's block?*

2. As a class, review the following methods for overcoming writer's block. Explain that these concepts can be helpful in test-taking situations, as well as when writing college or scholarship essays.

#### **If students are stuck but have lots of time, suggest they:**

- . Take a break. Focusing on and completing something else can clear the head.
- . Try writing the essay as a letter to someone. Writing a letter may remove the looming sense of formality.
- . Approach the assignment as just a personal exercise.
- . Brainstorm and then discuss general ideas with family, friends, or teachers.

#### **If students are stuck but pressed for time, suggest they:**

- . Jot down notes that address parts of the question. Create an outline with each section representing a part of the question, and then build on the sections of the outline.
- . Break the task into smaller pieces.
- . Get up during scheduled breaks. Then walk back to your desk and try again!
- . Work on another part of the test, and then return to the question afterward.

3. Distribute **Overcome Writer's Block Student Reproducible 3** and read it together. Give students 10 minutes to write a personal response to each statement.

4. After the two writing assignments are complete, discuss what techniques students used, what was effective, and why.

## Lesson 3: The Editing Process

**Time Required:** 40 minutes

**Materials:** Critique and Edit student reproducible 4 (PDF) ,pen

### Directions:

1. Distribute **Critique and Edit Student Reproducible 4** and review the Editing Tips sidebar. Make sure that students understand all terms such as *tone*, *diction*, *transition*, and *conclusion*.
2. Read the sample essay aloud with students. Have them evaluate the essay in groups of three using the Editing Tips sidebar. Instruct students to identify parts of the essay they wish to emulate and parts they feel they could improve on.
3. Discuss student evaluations of the sample essay as a class.
4. Instruct students to draft their own essays for peer and teacher review.

### Application Essay Rubric

As your students review their essays, encourage them to consider the following questions:

#### Content

- . **Message:** What is the message of the essay? Does the writer address this idea in an interesting and personal way? Does the essay include evidence of the writer's reflection upon the significance of event(s)?
- . **Tone:** Is the tone of voice consistent?
- . **Metaphor, Simile, Imagery:** Does the writer **avoid general statements** that tell the reader what to think and instead **use specific details** (e.g., metaphor, simile, imagery) that cause the reader to feel what was intended by the writer?
- . **Diction:** Does the writer make strong and varied word choices that suggest specific connotations? Is repetition of words/phrases used to create dramatic emphasis and help unify different parts of the essay?
- **Varied sentence lengths and structure:** Consider the rhythm created by sentences. Does the essay use different sentence lengths to create dramatic emphasis?

#### Organization

- . **Focus:** Is the piece focused and personal? Does it try to cover too much or too little?
- . **Paragraphs:** Is each paragraph unified around one idea? Does each paragraph have a clear, thematic topic sentence? Does each paragraph conclude with an analytical statement?
- . **Transitions:** Are there transitions within and between paragraphs that give a clear sense of analytical progression, through repetition of key words and ideas?
- . **Introduction:** Does the introduction hook the reader (the admissions officer), leaving him or her wondering what comes next?
- . **Conclusion:** Does the conclusion elaborate upon the ideas set forth in the essay and address their greater significance? Does the conclusion avoid artificial summary/closure?



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# Outline Your Essay

Describe an event or experience that had a positive influence on the way that you approach financial management. Outline the most helpful thing you learned and how it led to the development of specific skills.

**ANECDOTAL EVENT:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**PERSONAL MESSAGE:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**INTRODUCTION:**

A. Possible hook 1: \_\_\_\_\_

B. Possible hook 2: \_\_\_\_\_

**1 BODY PARAGRAPH:**

A. Main idea: \_\_\_\_\_

B. Important details: \_\_\_\_\_

C. Topic sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

**2 BODY PARAGRAPH:**

A. Main idea: \_\_\_\_\_

B. Important details: \_\_\_\_\_

C. Topic sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

**3 BODY PARAGRAPH:**

A. Main idea: \_\_\_\_\_

B. Important details: \_\_\_\_\_

C. Topic sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

**CONCLUSION:**

A. How specific event connects to larger idea/questions you still have:

\_\_\_\_\_

## Need a Scholarship?

Use this essay for a chance to win a \$15,000 college scholarship. If you are in grades 11 or 12 send your essays to: Scholarship Contest, c/o Scholastic Inc., P.O. Box 713, New York, NY 10013-0713. Entries must be postmarked by 3/10/06. Visit [www.scholastic.com/collegesuccess](http://www.scholastic.com/collegesuccess) for the official entry form.

**TIPS:** Read the College Bound student magazine to learn about college life and enter for a chance to win a \$15,000 college scholarship! For questions to test your financial smarts, log on to: [www.Students.UseCreditWisely.com](http://www.Students.UseCreditWisely.com).



# Brainstorm Your Ideas

A strong scholarship or college essay is **anecdotal** (an essay that describes an interesting event from an autobiographical perspective). Since you only have the attention of the college admissions officer for approximately 500 words, you should focus on a specific event and what that event revealed to you, rather than explain multiple events.

**A Which events in your life would make strong anecdotes?** In column “A” below, jot down brief descriptions of recent events that connect to each concept or idea.

**B Reread your ideas and identify key words.** What is the message of the text? How can I address this idea in an interesting and personal way?

**C Review each of the events you indicated.** Think about how important each event was to you and why it was important. In column “C” answer the following questions: How did this event change you? How did you initially react? How were some of your views challenged? What was the new understanding of the world you gained from this event?

A. CONCEPT/IDEA	B. KEY WORDS	C. REFLECTION
A significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you is:		
A person who has had a significant influence on you is:		
A character in fiction, a historical figure, or a creative work (as in art, music, science, etc.) that has had an influence on you is:		
An issue of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you is:		
Describe an event or experience that had a positive influence on the way that you approach financial management. Outline the most helpful thing you learned and how it led to the development of specific skills.		

**TIPS:** Regardless of what you are writing about, you want to remember that you are trying to show how you will be a valuable member of your desired college's community. Remember: Avoid repeating information already listed on your scholarship or college application; clarify anything you wish to explain further; address any particular hardships or difficulties you have overcome in high school.



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# Overcome Writer's Block

*Writer's block can be caused by fear or anything else that makes it difficult to write. The fact is that good writing is hard to do, but a rough first draft can easily turn into a polished final draft. The key to overcoming writer's block is knowing what to do when it happens.*

- 1** Read the quote below and write a reflection about what this nonsensical verse means to you. Use a separate sheet of paper if you run out of room.

**“Twas brillig, and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe;  
All mimsy were the borogoves, and the mome raths outgrabe.” (Lewis Carroll)**

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- Was this verse difficult to respond to? Why or why not?

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- What methods did you use to write this personal response?

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- 2** Now try this one...

**“Making financial choices can feel like being in stormy waters in a rocky harbor.”**

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- Was this verse difficult to respond to? Why or why not?

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- What methods did you use to write this personal response?

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- Were there any differences between writing the first and second responses? What was different?

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## Information Is Power

### Be organized:

- Sit down with your parents to discuss finances.
- Apply for local and national scholarships.
- Keep your parents advised of financial aid application deadlines.
- Make an appointment with your school guidance counselor and collect financial aid applications.
- Show several people drafts of your application essay.

**TIPS:** Do the research: Look online at sites such as [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) and [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com) for financial aid and scholarship listings; arrange overnight visits; attend classes at colleges you are interested in. For questions to test your financial smarts, log on to: [www.Students.UseCreditWisely.com](http://www.Students.UseCreditWisely.com).

# Critique and Edit



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*You are a college admissions officer. You are reviewing an essay in response to the question: What have you done to prepare yourself financially for college? Review the guidelines below to evaluate this essay's strengths and weaknesses. Would you recommend this student for admission based on this personal statement? Why or why not?*

My first college meeting with my school guidance counselor, Mr. Grannan, left me with a Tasmanian devil's sense of the college application process. As I walked back to study hall, I reviewed the handout of everything I would have to do: study for and take the college entrance exams, research schools, request applications, ask teachers and my coach for recommendations, write the college essay. At dinner that night I anxiously gave my parents an overview of all that lay ahead of me. I was anticipating their usual proclamations of faith in me followed by my mother's goofy jokes about the kind of crazed creature I was about to become. Instead my mom soberly stated, "We've saved since the day you were born, but it won't be enough. Honey, you'll have to get a job."

Admittedly, initially there was a sense of anger: I thought that I had done my part and that paying for college was their job. But I came to the realization that college is my opportunity and working to pay for it is just one more way of making it happen. So I chose the job that promised the most money possible: waiting tables. It's a simple job with a very clear reward system. Run around, deliver people's orders, be friendly, be patient, and get an immediate response: a good tip or a bad one.

After a double shift at Papa Joe's on Saturday, my body aches while my mind still maintains the fast tempo of Saturday night in a restaurant. Keeping up the pace, I quickly count my tips, put them into a deposit envelope, and mark the total on the outside. Sometimes it's easy to think of college only in terms of dollars and deficit: how much I have saved and how much more I need...

We're all in our own separate but parallel universes: We see the same things but don't experience them in the same way. I know that sometimes, in a way that I've kept hidden from myself, I've believed that this world was my universe, and that I should be given what I want. Depositing my weekly tips in the bank staves off the need for immediate gratification.

The anxiety I felt leaving Mr. Grannan's office has been replaced by an awareness that I am in control of the situation. Financial preparation is not really about money but about taking responsibility for oneself.

## Editing Tips

### Message:

Does the writer address this idea in an interesting and personal way?

### Tone:

Is the tone of voice consistent and positive?

### Metaphor, Simile, Imagery:

Does the writer use details that don't tell the reader things, but rather illustrate feelings through behavior and word choice?

### Diction:

Does the writer make strong and varied word choices that are vivid and appropriate?

### Sentences:

Does the writer use sentence lengths in a way that creates dramatic emphasis?

### Focus:

Is the essay focused and personal? Does it try to cover too much or too little?

### Paragraphs:

Is each paragraph unified around one idea?

### Transitions:

Are there transitions within and between paragraphs that give a clear sense of analytical progression?

### Introduction:

Does the introduction hook the reader (admissions officer)?

### Conclusion:

Does the conclusion elaborate upon the ideas set forth in the essay and address their greater significance?

### Audience:

Does the essay show how the writer could become a valuable member of the desired college's community?

**ENTER:** For a chance to win a \$15,000 scholarship, submit your own essay answering the question: "Describe an event or experience that had a positive influence on the way that you approach financial management. Outline the most helpful thing you learned and how it led to the development of specific skills." Visit [www.scholastic.com/collegesuccess](http://www.scholastic.com/collegesuccess) for an official entry form. All entries must be postmarked by 3/10/06.