


Scholarships

How to get that money!



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 Services are provided at no cost to Montana families. Reach Higher Montana is a nonprofit that helps students strategically pursue educational opportunities.

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Scholarships

There are two important things to keep in mind when it comes to scholarships:

YOU are scholarship material. Yes, you! You don't need a 4.0 GPA to earn scholarship money. You just need a good story!

Treat applying for scholarships like a job. It takes work; a lot of work. But the good news is there are LOTS of scholarships out there!

Why we love scholarships:

Scholarships are free money that can put a dent in your education costs. Education is an investment in yourself and your future and the returns you'll see from that investment are priceless. But education comes with a price tag.

No one likes paying full price. When you shop online, do you search for a promo code to apply to your cart before checking out? Think of scholarships as your promo code. You can pay for some or even all of your education with scholarships - it's up to you.

Where to Start

1 Get Organized

There are several components that go into a scholarship application. Before you start your search for free money, gather the following information:

- **Academic resume** - put together a list of sports, extracurricular activities (clubs, student organizations), volunteer experience, leadership roles, honors/awards
- **Letters of recommendation (work & academic)**
- **High school transcript**
- **ACT and/or SAT test scores**
- **Record of AP/dual enrollment classes and scores**

2 Search

When it comes to searching for scholarships, our [website](#) is a great place to start. We've curated a list of state and local scholarships for Montana students. Our experience working with students and scholarships for many years has shown that students are typically more successful earning local scholarships - there are generally fewer students competing for these awards compared to national scholarships. Next, take advantage of the scholarship search tool on the [Montana Career Information System](#) (MCIS). The Montana Department of Labor and Industry provides a great way to search and apply for scholarships specific to your characteristics, interests, program of study, and more. Check out the video on our website to learn how to search for scholarships on MCIS.

There are lots of scholarship tools on the Internet. Be careful - you should never pay money to apply for a scholarship, and you'll want to make sure you understand how your personal information is collected and used by scholarship sites. In addition to MCIS, we recommend mycollegeoptions.org. This search tool works similarly to MCIS and includes both state and national scholarships.

3 The Essay

Scholarships represent different businesses, causes, or people, which means your essay will always vary. Luckily, we work closely with a Montana author who gave us the secret ingredients to writing a winning essay.

Virginia Reeves is an accomplished author who offers the following tips for writing a compelling essay.

■ **Remember, you are telling a story.** Winning essays happen because the reader is told a story they can feel, relate to, easily follow along to. Your experiences should be done in a story format because we as people are narratively driven. Elements for a good story:

■ **Theme - what is the central focus of your story?** What are you trying to convey - Triumph? Ambition? Loss? Fear? Survival? Good vs evil?

■ **Plot** - This is the sequence of events that keeps the reader engaged in your story. They hang on wanting to know how the story resolves itself.

■ As a writer, before diving into writing your essay, **outline the series of events** that will occur in your story to ensure your story stays on track.

■ **Characters** - One of the characters in your story will likely be you. Your main characters should be someone readers can feel something in common with. They also shouldn't be perfect. The perfect character is unrelatable because no one is perfect. What is relatable are flaws or weaknesses; they humanize us.

■ **Style & tone** - Know who your audience is and use words to paint a picture. Give speech direct quotes like "Go away!" instead of something indirect like "She told him to go away." Write as you would speak it. If you use fancy, over the top words, it can be distracting to the reader. Be simple and clear so that your writing is easy to understand.

■ For crafting an unforgettable college or scholarship essay, we recommend reading "*Write Your Way In*" by Rachel Toor!

■ **The story that you're sharing, have that be unique and specific to you.** Unless specifically directed, scholarship essays are not based on fiction, they're based on stories that shape you as a person. Readers want to know what you have gone through to be changed in one way or another.

■ **Finally, the story should be about how you overcame something.** Whatever you conquered shows strength, tenacity, and spirit, all of which are good qualities in a person. Remember, the reader is looking for a recipient who matches the character of their organization, cause or person. Tease out the qualities of them and apply it to your story.



Treat Scholarships like a Job

When it comes to scholarships, applying to one and being done is not a good strategy. It takes work. Think of it as a part-time job, which most high school students do. Let's say you work twelve hours a week at \$9.00 an hour. After taxes, you're looking at a paycheck around \$90. Not too shabby. But if you take that same amount of time and compare it to applying to 12 scholarships, which you win two at \$1,000 each, you're looking at a \$2,000 paycheck! That's almost a 200% difference!

There is no secret to earning scholarship money. The recipe is simple: build a strong work and academic resume, write like your education counts on it and make applying for scholarships a part of everyday life.

That's it!



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