**Top 10 Scholarship Do's and Don'ts**

By Gen and Kelly Tanabe authors of [The Ultimate Scholarship Book](http://www.amazon.com/Ultimate-Scholarship-Book-2011-Scholarships/dp/1932662413/ref%3Dsr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1273873616&sr=1-1) and winners of more than $100,000 in scholarships.

Scholarship judges may spend just a few precious minutes or even seconds reviewing your scholarship application. With such a finite amount of time to make a lasting impression on these important decision makers, it's crucial that you make the most of this opportunity. If not, your application may be on the fast track to the circular file. To help, here are the Top 10 Scholarship Do's and Don'ts that you must know to increase your chances of winning.

**Top 10 Scholarship Do's**

1. Get friendly with your own neighborhood. Take a look around yourself, and you're likely to find some of the best scholarships. Your community is one of the biggest sources of scholarships. Local businesses, service organizations, city governments and even politicians often offer scholarships for students. Find out about these kinds of awards by contacting your local chamber of commerce and by reading your community newspaper.
2. Choose quality over quantity. Unless you plan to make applying for scholarships your fulltime occupation, you'll need to prioritize which scholarships to apply for. Instead of trying to apply to as many scholarships as possible, try to apply to the scholarships that best fit you.
3. Understand the purpose of the scholarship. Every scholarship has a reason for its existence. Scholarships may be designed to encourage students to enter a specific career field, to reward students who contribute to their communities or to help underserved students enter higher education. Whatever the purpose of the scholarship is, it's important for you to understand why it exists. Then use this information to guide how you write your scholarship application. For example, if you are applying for a scholarship that is based on volunteer work, then focus on how you have served the community in your application rather than any of your other achievements.
4. Follow the directions. From your first game of Simon Says, you learned how to follow directions. And yet, when students apply for scholarships and thousands of dollars are at stake, many do not do this. It's simple. Include all the information and forms requested, and answer every question.
5. Write an essay that demonstrates why you should win. If you think of the scholarship application as your first handshake when meeting a person, then the scholarship essay is like your first conversation. It gives the scholarship judges a sense of who you are and what's important to you. As you're writing your essay, it's important to make a case for why you deserve to win. Think about what skills and qualities the scholarship judges seek and then describe how you match them.
6. Get feedback from editors. You can't write a strong scholarship essay in a vacuum, and editors are the best people to help. Friends, teacher and even parents can make great editors.
7. Proofread. No matter how strong of an applicant you are, it would be difficult for a scholarship judge to overlook spelling or grammatical errors. Proofread your application and essays yourself, and have your editors do the same.
8. Practice for interviews. Some scholarships require an interview, and the best way to stand out in this forum is to practice. Ask a friend or parent to do a mock interview with you to prepare for the real thing.
9. Ask your parents for help. Mom and Dad are capable of doing more than write the tuition check. They can help you find scholarships, keep track of deadlines and give you feedback on your applications and essays.
10. Brag a little about yourself. No one else is going to do it for you so you'll need to let your best self shine through in your scholarship applications.

**Top 10 Scholarship Don'ts**

1. 1. Don't overlook your college financial aid officer or guidance counselor. Cozy up to these two people to get the scoop on awards from your college or high school and for local students. Helping students pay for college is their job, and you should take advantage of the knowledge they've accumulated.
2. 2. Don't ignore the Internet. Fire up the computer, and use free web-based scholarship searches like ours (link to Financialaid.com scholarship search) to find more scholarships.
3. 3. Don't ignore small awards. When there are scholarships worth tens of thousands of dollars, you might think you shouldn't bother with the small potato awards. The truth is that a $1,000 scholarship is $1,000 less that you will spend, and even if it doesn't make a significant dent in your tuition, it can buy your books.
4. 4. Don't think that you have to be an academic or athletic superstar to win. There are scholarships based on leadership, art, music, theatre, cheerleading, public service and more.
5. 5. Don't be a victim of a scholarship scam. Never pay for a scholarship search, to apply for a scholarship or for a listing of awards. You can find scholarships on your own for free, and scholarships are designed to not cost anything to apply.
6. 6. Don't use the shotgun approach. It can be tempting to send the same application and essay to every scholarship competition, but this would be a mistake. Remember that all organizations that give away scholarships have different selection criteria. This means that the same application won't work for all of them.
7. 7. Don't forget to answer the question in your essay. There's a reason why the scholarship organizations provide the essay questions. They want to know your answer. An essay can be very well-written, but if it doesn't answer the question asked, then it's not going to win.
8. 8. Don't wait until the last minute. You may think that you do your best work on the day before the deadline at 3 a.m., but if you review your work you'll probably see that you don't. Take the pressure off, and allow yourself more time to complete an application.
9. 9. Don't turn in an application that is incomplete. Scholarship organizations receive far more applicants than they can support. Don't give them a reason to take you out of the running for not having a complete application, something that many organizations do.
10. 10. Don't think that it's impossible for you to win. Every student who has won a scholarship has thought this. And guess what? They won, and you can, too.