

*Hayley Capp, winner of the 2013 QS Leadership Scholarship, shares her top tips on****how to write a winning scholarship application essay****.*

There is no one way to write a winning [scholarship](https://www.topuniversities.com/student-info/scholarship-advice/scholarships-study-abroad) application. If you gathered together all the scholarship entries that have ever won a prize, you would find it difficult to identify what made them the same. Each would offer a distinctive style employed by the author; a unique insight into his or her past, present and future aspirations.

This uniqueness is the key, and the first point to remember when you pick up your pen to write. Make your scholarship application essay exclusive to you, personalize it, delve deep into your passion and drive to study your subject, and create a response that could only ever relate to you. It is this individuality that stands out, and that’s exactly what catches a judge’s eye and defines a winner.

I won the 2013 [QS Leadership Scholarship](https://www.topuniversities.com/node/11186), so will base my guidance on my own thought process when shaping my application essay. However, the basic principles that I highlight with this example can be extracted and applied to other scholarship essay writing processes.

1. Read and re-read the essay statement you are being asked to respond to, and identify the key themes.

From my own example, the essay statement was: ‘*Where I have demonstrated responsible leadership, or innovation, and how it made a difference either in my community or in my work’*. I identified the key themes as ‘leadership’ and ‘community impact’.

## 2. Understand the meaning of the key themes.

After identifying the key themes, it is important to understand what each of these ideas really means, beyond the initial level. For instance, I acknowledged that the meaning of ‘leadership’ involved identifying the effects my leadership had – the actions taken and results achieved under my leadership – and not simply describing the position I held and my responsibilities. The more depth you bring to your understanding of the meaning of each theme, the more examples you will be able to identify to demonstrate your abilities.

## 3. Fill your scholarship essay with keywords/synonyms of keywords used in the scholarship statement.

Using the keywords from the **scholarship statement** throughout your essay will demonstrate your commitment to addressing the question being asked. For instance, I made a special effort to ensure references to ‘leadership’; ‘innovation’ and ‘impacting communities’ ran throughout my essay.

## 4. Make an engaging start to your essay.

If you are struggling to start your scholarship application essay, why not include a quote or statement that relates to your intended course, and which you can later link to the main body of your text. Showing wider knowledge and aptitude for your subject will help convince the judges that it is a worthwhile investment to support you in your chosen course.

## 5. Understand the criteria used by the scholarship committee to evaluate application essays.

Based on my own experience, I have outlined what I believe to be the key criteria used by **scholarship committee** judges for evaluating scholarship application essays on the themes of leadership and community impact. My advice would be to address all of these areas in your essay, whether the question explicitly asks for it or not.

## What to include in scholarship essays about leadership:

* **The extent of the leadership experience and degree of accomplishment**. What were the results? Did you manage to grow a society from 10 to 100 members through your tenure?
* **Why you got involved in the leadership experience**. What was your initial inspiration and how did the experience make you feel? This is a very important aspect as it allows you to show your sincerity and demonstrates your passion.
* **What obstacles did you face and how did you overcome them**? Inspirational stories of perseverance despite adversity make readers (especially judges) want to help you succeed. It also shows that you have great leadership qualities: the ability to adapt to new situations and the determination to not give up.
* **What did you learn?** **How did these lessons shape you as a leader?** Every experience brings new lessons and personal growth opportunities and the best leaders are humble and realize this. Speaking about these lessons indicates that you have truly reflected on your experiences and that you understand what leadership is. (In other words, you know that leadership isn’t just about getting a title like “President” or “Executive Director”.)
* **What does this mean for the future**? A scholarship isn’t just an award; it’s an investment in your future. So if you plan to continue being involved in your particular leadership activity in the future, tell the judges.

What to include in scholarship essays about community impact:

* **How much time did you dedicate to the activity?**The scholarship committee is likely to be looking for applicants who made a fairly long commitment to a community activity.
* **Why was it important to you?**Joy from helping others? Excitement of trying something new? Opportunity to form relationships with others? Having a genuine reason helps build a convincing essay.
* **Why was it important to the community?**Ask the question: What would be different for your community if you *didn’t* do what you do? It is most important to show that you recognize the real needs in your communities, and act to address these.
* **What did you gain yourself through giving to the community?**It is important to show that you understand how through giving, you end up receiving more in the end. Sharing what community service has taught you and how it helped you develop demonstrates that you have truly gained from your participation and suggests you will continue doing so in the future.

My final point of advice when writing your scholarship application essay or [cover letter](https://www.topuniversities.com/blog/how-write-scholarship-application-cover-letter) is to really show that you know who you are. What are the relevant past and present experiences that demonstrate your abilities and where are you headed? Use carefully selected language to emphasize your passion, ambition and enthusiasm and remember to adopt a positive mindset, in which you believe in all the great things you have done and plan to continue achieving in the future. If you don’t believe in yourself, why would the judges?

Good luck!