

**Writing Guidelines & Checklist  
for Fellowship and Award Applicants / DePauw University  
September 2011**

In many ways, a scholarship application essay resembles other types of analytical essays that you have been asked to write in your courses at DePauw. It must present a clear, logically developed, well-illustrated set of points; it must be a unified whole, rather than a string of observations; and it must be aware of its audience (faculty members, business people, and experts in the area defined by the scholarship).

Unlike research essays and science lab reports, however, most scholarship essays expect you to talk about personal experience. Using the first-person ("I") in a critical essay may be the single most difficult challenge for scholarship applicants. Scholarship essays need to make good, clear points, but they also need to tell stories and to convey the character, personality, values, and experiences of the writer. Strong scholarship essays are both critically astute and deeply personal.

**As you review your scholarship essay draft, ask yourself the following questions:**

1. Does the essay *address the prompt directly*, answering all of its embedded questions?
2. Does the writer give *specific, detailed examples* to illustrate each of the points made in the essay?
3. Does the writer *show him or herself in action*, rather than simply listing credentials and skills?
4. Do the *topic sentences (first sentence of each paragraph) make a point or lay out an idea* that is then developed and illustrated by the paragraph that follows? That is, could a reader follow the gist of the writer's argument by reading only those first sentences?
5. What sentences or ideas best identify *the writer's passion in life*? Could the essay begin with *or more fully highlight* these sentences and ideas?

**The following questions are usually best to ask when reviewing a near-final draft of the scholarship essay:**

1. Does the opening sentence catch the reader's attention?
2. Does the last sentence pull ideas in the essay together? Is it adequately specific and visionary (rather than just a flat summary)?
3. Does the essay have momentum? Does it build up to its most interesting and important insight?
4. Is there a thread connecting the different parts of the essay -- an idea or image that unites the essay as a whole?
5. Do any points remain vague, overly general, or incompletely illustrated?
6. Does the essay use unnecessary words? (Experiment by cutting adjectives and adverbs, especially intensifiers such as "unique" "entire" "overwhelming" "completely" "absolutely" "definitely". The plain sentence that results usually has more power and punch.)
7. Do the essays adhere to character or word limits?
8. And finally, is it thoroughly edited?

*If you would like to talk about your fellowship or award application essay, please email [mmcinn@depauw.edu](mailto:mmcinn@depauw.edu). My office hours for Fall 2011 are 1:30-3:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday.*

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