

Scholarship Applications 101: A Focus on the Essays

General Guidelines

- Know Your Timeline: Keep in mind the deadline and plan ahead.
- Answer the questions: Read the application materials carefully.
- Organize thoughts: Make an outline to tell your story in a thoughtful, concise way.
- Be descriptive, personal, and passionate.
- Find an editor: Leave time to have others proof read your essay, and for you to make corrections.

How to Structure Your Winning Essay

Paragraph 1: Introduction to YOU

Who are you? What is your college and career goal (what are you studying, what is your ultimate degree/career objective)? What made you decide to study abroad? What program are you applying for, and how will it support your goals? This should be a broad introductory statement; you'll get into the details in later paragraphs.

Paragraph 2: How Your Chosen Study Abroad Program Fits Your Goals

Describe what parts of your chosen study abroad program are most important to you and why. You don't need to talk about every aspect of the program, but focus on the aspects that are most important to you. How does this particular program and its location/design help further your specific academic, career, or lifelong goals?

Try to tie specific details of the program (a particular course you will take, a volunteer opportunity you plan to take advantage of, the location of the program, the language you will study) to specific life and/or career goals (for example: volunteering with a local environmental non-profit -> your interest in environmental issues and goal of getting a biology degree; living with a host family -> your goal to increase your language and cultural fluency so that you will be a stronger candidate for jobs in the business world; taking a course in community service -> your goal of getting a degree in Social Work).

NOTE: Many scholarship programs give extra weight to applicants who plan to study abroad in locations outside of Western Europe/Australia/New Zealand, for longer than 4-6 weeks, and/or who will be studying a foreign language. If the program you've chosen falls in one of these categories, be sure to emphasize your choice and why you made it. If you've chosen a program that **doesn't** fall into any of these categories, and have a compelling reason why it would be difficult for you to choose a program that does (for example: you have chosen a 3-week program because you have kids and/or work full time and can't be away for a longer period), be sure to mention that, and emphasize how the program you've chosen will still help you reach your goals.

Paragraph 3: Your Compelling Story

Scholarship providers are looking to support students who have overcome challenges and/or who are under-represented in study abroad (including community college students; students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds; veterans; LGBTQ students; ethnic and racial minorities; first-generation college students; and older/returning students). Coming from a background with economic, medical, personal, or other challenges; facing discrimination or hardships; going to school while supporting your family financially; or lacking financial and/or personal support from your family for your education are good examples of challenges and barriers to studying abroad that scholarship committees are looking to help students overcome through scholarship support.

Telling your personal story in detail can be very difficult, but helping the reader understand why this scholarship, and the opportunity to study abroad, will help you continue to break down barriers and achieve your academic and career dreams is critical to a winning essay. This paragraph is the space to connect with the person reading your essay and make yourself memorable. Be specific, descriptive, passionate, and concise.

Paragraph 4: Conclusion + How You Plan to Give Back

How do you anticipate your study abroad experience affecting your future plans and decisions? How do you plan to encourage more people within your community to study abroad? Think creatively and realistically about your interests and your abilities. For example, don't promise to make a million-hit YouTube video if you don't own a camera. Instead, talk about ways that you will build on your existing skills and interests to contribute back.

NOTE: The Gilman Scholarship offers you a separate essay for your follow on project proposal. They offer excellent tips and guidelines via the website (<http://www.iie.org/Programs/Gilman-Scholarship-Program>). Click "Application Process", then "Tips".