

The 6 Most Common Mistakes When Applying to Scholarships

1. Ignoring the Instructions

Pay attention to the questions in the application, the questions will contain a lot of information that is vital to your success.

- **Answer all the questions in full.** Sometimes there are three separate questions baked into one. Make sure your answer clearly hits every point.
- **Watch the word count and follow the instructions.** If the question says “max. 200 words” do not go over 200 words. It doesn’t mean you have to write 199 words to be successful, but you should definitely aim for somewhere above 100 words if possible.
- **Use keywords from the question in your answer.** E.g. if the question includes words like “community”, “selflessness”, “innovation” etc., try to incorporate similar words in your answer.

*ScholarTree Tip: always look at the “about us” section on the company’s website to understand their key values. Then, try to highlight and incorporate these values and themes in your application where possible.

2. Uploading Files that are Incompatible

Ideally, scholarship providers will specify the type of file to use when uploading attachments, e.g. word document, pdf, etc. If they do, **make sure you follow it**, or you run the risk of having your application being overlooked because the file is incompatible.

If they do not specify the type of file to use, the safest option is a PDF or word document because these formats are usually compatible with any type of computer or operating systems. So, for Mac users or for those of you who like using Google docs...spend the extra few minutes converting your files before submitting an application so that you never have to worry about being disqualified for incompatible formatting.

3. Submitting an Incomplete Application

When working on an application, it’s so easy to accidentally miss a question or forget to upload a document especially for scholarships with several requirements. To avoid this mistake:

- Read the requirements carefully before you begin
- Make a checklist of all the requirements (including any specific documents that need to be included)
- Before you submit the application, review your checklist to make sure nothing has slipped through the cracks.

To avoid this mistake, ScholarTree makes it impossible for students to submit scholarship applications through our site if they are incomplete because you will not be able to click ‘submit’ until all questions are answered.

4. Providing Incorrect Contact Information

The most common way scholarships are awarded through email. Most scholarship providers will notify the winner by email, and if they don’t hear back for a period of time, they may try to contact the winner over the phone if they are feeling generous. The more likely scenario is that they will simply move on to the next student on the list. To avoid this, it’s vital that you provide accurate contact information and an email that you check regularly.

For ScholarTree users, remember that the email and contact information you use to sign up on our site is the information that is passed along to scholarship providers. We hear from a lot of students who sign up with a high school email address that they cannot access after graduation so make sure the email you choose is one that you will be able to access on an ongoing basis.

5. Forgetting to Proofread

Whether you agree with it or not, people tend to discount writing that has spelling and/or grammatical errors. To avoid this costly mistake, here are some strategies to try before submitting an application:

- **Use tools like Grammarly** (it's free and much better than the standard spell check)
- **Print out a hardcopy.** There is something about looking at your words on a piece of paper that makes the formatting and spelling errors jump out much quicker than staring at a screen so don't underestimate the benefit of reviewing your application with a paper and pen.
- **Peer review:** get a friend, a parent or a teacher to review your application and essay. If possible, give your peer reviewer a hardcopy so they can easily provide comments and feedback on the flow and readability of your writing.

6. Not Checking the Deadline

To state the obvious, if you miss a scholarship deadline, you will not be considered for the scholarship. But let's go a bit deeper to talk about timeliness and in particular, time zones. For students who live in a time zone other than Eastern Standard Time, you need to pay very close attention to the deadlines stated in scholarship applications. As a good rule of thumb, if an application says 11:59 pm on March 31st, it's almost guaranteed this means 11:59 EST.

****ScholarTree Tip:** we also recommend that you set reminders in your calendar or on your phone for scholarship deadlines. While ScholarTree automatically sends email notifications two weeks in advance of a scholarship deadline to make sure nothing is missed, many other scholarships will not have this feature.