

What to give your letter-writers

Each major scholarship comes with its own set of tailored guidelines. Ask Barb Stedman for that information.

On a single sheet of paper (front and back), with your name, address, phone number, and email address at the top, provide the following information in clear, concise language (no long paragraphs):

1. A brief description of the scholarship.

These descriptions can be found on the scholarship website or, in the case of major national scholarships, at www.bsu.edu/honors/scholarships. Click on the name of the scholarship you're applying for, then cut, paste, and edit info as needed from the first paragraph.

If you're applying for one of the most prestigious scholarships in the country, be sure to tell your letter-writers that fact, and let them know their letters are of vital importance to your chances of winning one.

If the scholarship that you're applying for requires letter-writers to address particular qualities in its applicants (e.g., "commitment to career in public service"), be sure to note that information.

2. Selected highlights (in list form) of accomplishments that are pertinent to the scholarship you're applying for.

Some scholarship advisors recommend giving letter-writers your résumé. I don't, unless the letter-writer asks for one. Even a letter-writer who knows and loves you may think, incorrectly, that a good letter of recommendation consists of paraphrasing info that's on the résumé. Since you're already stating that information in your application, it should not be restated, line for line, in a letter as well. It may, in fact, hurt your chances of winning a scholarship.

Instead, tailor your list to the scholarship and to each particular letter-writer. Be sure to include reminders of important things that you did while studying under, working for, or otherwise interacting with the letter-writer. Provide approximate dates and short descriptions of noteworthy projects, papers, etc.

Be sure your letter-writers understand that you're not telling them what to put in their letters, but that you're simply providing them reference material, should they need it. Most letter-writers will be grateful for the reminders.

3. A sentence or two that describe your plans and goals for graduate school and your career.

If you have big plans and visions, don't be afraid to spell them out for your letter-writer. Most major scholarship foundations award their funds to students who will have an impact on their field and/or on society.

4. Logistical information.

a. *Deadline.*

- ♦ If you're applying for a scholarship that has a campus review process, give your letter-writers the campus deadline.
- ♦ If there is no campus review, and your letter-writers are sending their letters directly to the foundation, be sure your letter writers know the date on which their letters must be postmarked or received (distinguish which is the case). It's always a good idea to give letter writers a deadline that's a day or two earlier than the actual deadline, to avoid last-minute headaches.

b. *Delivery of letter.*

If you're applying for a scholarship that has a campus review process (not including the Fulbright; see special instructions below*), ask your letter-writers to send their letters to me via email (as an attachment, sent to bstedman@bsu.edu) or via campus mail or USPS (addressed to Barb Stedman, Director of National and International Scholarships, Honors College, CA 104, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306). Let them know that further instructions for submitting the final letter will follow from me, once the campus committee has reviewed your application.

If you're applying for a scholarship that does *not* have a campus review process, you and I can decide together how your letters should be submitted. (I am usually happy and able to send in your entire application packet for you.) Give your recommenders simple, clear instructions about how to submit their letters, whether electronically or in hard copy. If the latter is the case, be sure to provide that information on your sheet. Please ask them to send me a copy of their letter as well, for your file.

*Letters for Fulbright applications should be sent or delivered to Dom Caristi, Assoc. Prof. of Telecommunications, Dept., BC 201, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306.

- c. *Letter greeting.* If you are applying for a scholarship that includes a campus review, provide this line of guidance to your letter-writers: "The greeting line of your letter should not address Barb Stedman [or Dom Caristi] or the Ball State campus review committee. Instead, it should address the particular scholarship foundation or, simply, 'the Scholarship Selection Committee.'"

When your recommenders have agreed to write a letter, please let me know, and I'll try to follow up with my own email, as time allows.

Other things you may need to give your letter-writers

1. Cover sheet (if applicable)

Some scholarship foundations provide cover sheets that you must sign and give to your letter writers. Be sure to remind your endorsers to sign the form and return it to me OR, if applicable, send it to the scholarship foundation along with their letters.

2. Any letter-writing tip sheets that I may have given to you. (Doesn't apply to all scholarships.)

Misc. tips

- ◆ Whenever possible, ask for letters of recommendation in person.
- ◆ If possible, ask for letters a month before they're needed. Never give less than two weeks.
- ◆ **YOU** are responsible for following up with your letter-writers and making sure they remember to send their letters. A week before the due date, it's smart to send a friendly reminder that the deadline is approaching.
- ◆ Remember to send a heartfelt, written (not emailed) thank-you note to your letter-writers after the letter has been written. Ask them to save their letters on their computers, in case you decide to apply for other scholarships.
- ◆ Let them know the outcome of the scholarship competition!