**Scholarship Pitfalls and Strategies**

*A simple mistake could cost you a scholarship. It is important to pay attention to every detail. Applicants need to know what is being asked and need to comply with these requirements. Common mistakes are preventable. Avoid these common pitfalls by using these tips.*

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| COMMON MISTAKES | STRATEGIES  |
| Missing the deadline. | * Use a spreadsheet and add dates to a calendar.  *If possible,* use an electronic calendar that allows you to set reminders.
* Pay attention to deadlines that require mailing an item. Be sure to track any sent mail.
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| Not following instructions. | * Read the entire application and instructions before you begin working.
* Identify the goal and direct your application towards meeting it.
* Know the audience.
* Complete the application in full and follow the directions.
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| Typos and omitting requested information. | * Create a rubric.
* Proofread and ask others to proofread using the rubric.
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| Not following word count. | * If the application asks for a word range, hit the target.
* Use Microsoft Word to create draft. Online applications can time out and may not include spell check.
* Avoid falling off topic trying to meet the count.
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| Waiting until senior year to begin scholarship search. | * Start early.
* You can find scholarships even in 7th and 8th grade.
* Begin building a profile on theWashboard.org in middle school.
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| Being unprepared. | * Maintain a résumé and a list of your accomplishments.
* Get organized. You may need the following: HS transcripts, standardized test scores, FAFSA/WASFA, essays, letters of recommendation, etc.
* Save everything that you submit in case something gets lost.
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| Not meeting eligibility requirements. | * Apply only if eligible.
* Read requirements first. You will not be considered if you do not meet them.
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| Generic letters of recommendation. | * Request letters of recommendation from people who know you well and are able to talk about your abilities and attributes.
* Be sure to give the recommender enough time to write a letter.
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| Applying to one scholarship or giving up the application process altogether. | * Apply to as many scholarships as you are eligible.
* Start early and continue to apply through college.
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| Vague responses. | * Give concrete examples that illustrate your point.
* Be clear and concise.
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| Underselling yourself. | * Show strengths and explain weaknesses.
* GEAR UP can be listed as an activity.
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| Not asking for help. | * Get others to proofread your application.
* If English is not your first language, have a native speaker proofread.
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