



Virtual

**YOUTH CAREER & COLLEGE EXCELLENCE SUMMIT**

*"Back to the Future with Excellence"*

***Crafting Compelling Essays & Securing Scholarships***

***August 8, 2026***

**FEATURED SPEAKER**



**Dr. Christie Wilson**

**Award-winning Author**

**Director of the Center of Transformation**

**Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Washington**



# Topics Covered



- 01 What Are Scholarships
- 02 Who Offers Scholarships
- 03 Types of Scholarships
- 04 Finding Scholarships
- 05 Applying for Scholarships
- 06 Writing Compelling Essays
- 07 Leveraging AI in Essays

# Over \$1.7 Trillion in U.S Student Loan Debt

*U.S. Department of Education*



**GOAL: WIN SCHOLARSHIPS!!!**

***Reduce or Eliminate Student Loans***

# What Are Scholarships?

# What Are Scholarships?



**Gift aid or free money to help  
fund your education  
you DO NOT have to pay back!**

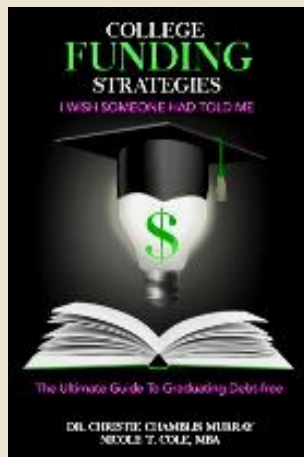


**Who Do You Know...  
Has Won A Scholarship?**



## Book & Workbook Templates

*“College Funding Strategies I Wish Someone Had Told Me”*



### Workbook Templates

- Template 1. Funding Situation Assessment
- Template 2. Calculate Your EFC
- Template 3. Customize Your Funding Approach
- Template 4. Scholar Financial Aid Checklist
- Template 5. Sample Award Letter
- Template 6. Scholar Profile
- Template 7. Sample Letter of Recommendation
- Template 8: Scholarship Essay Prompt
- Template 9: Funding/Scholarship Tracking Spreadsheet
- Template 10. Timeline Checklists by Funding Stages
- Template 11. College Funding Plan

<https://www.investnothers.com/college-funding-book-templates>

# These Strategies Work!

## *College Education Debt-free Success Stories*



~\$150,000 in Scholarships

**Hampton University  
Graduate**

Navy ROTC Scholarship  
Commissioned Naval Officer  
Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.



~\$130,000 in Scholarships

**Norfolk State University  
Class of 2026**

Computer Science Major  
Division 1 Football Scholarship  
Academic Scholarships



# Who Offers Scholarships?

# Who Offers Scholarships?



**Colleges/University**



**Non-profits**



**Companies**



**Community Groups**

# **Types of Scholarships**

# Many Types of Scholarships

**Need-based**

**Merit-based**

**Interest-based**

**Military**

**Athletic**

**Major/Career**



# **There's a scholarship for *Everyone*!!**

**Major**

**Grades/Test Scores**

**Gender**

**Career Interests**

**Ethnicity**

**Talents**

**Disability**

**Low Income**

**First Generation**

**Location**



# Finding Scholarships

# *Search for Unique & Low Competition Scholarships*

Small award  
amounts.

Few people know  
they exist.

Few people apply  
for.

Few people are  
eligible for.

Few people want  
to write essays.

Few people want  
to obtain letters of  
recommendation.

No one is You!  
Focus on what  
make you  
different/unique.

# Expanding Your Scholarship Search



**Explore What Makes  
You or Your Situations  
Unique**



**Leverage School  
Resources**



**Prioritize Local  
Scholarships**



**Use Dr. Christie's  
Scholarship Finder:  
HiddenGems**

# New Scholarship Finder

DEMO



An AI-powered Scholarship Finder

[www.investNothers.com/hiddengems](http://www.investNothers.com/hiddengems)

# HiddenGems \$cholarship Finder

## Downloadable Spreadsheet (.csv or .pdf)

| STUDENT PROFILE |                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                         |        |                  |                                                                                         |          |             |                                |                  |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Name            | John Doe                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                         |        |                  |                                                                                         |          |             |                                |                  |
| Location        | Stafford, Stafford County, Virginia                                |                                                                                                                                                                                         |        |                  |                                                                                         |          |             |                                |                  |
| GPA             | 3.2                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                         |        |                  |                                                                                         |          |             |                                |                  |
| Academic Level  | Graduate                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                         |        |                  |                                                                                         |          |             |                                |                  |
| Major           | Computer Science                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                         |        |                  |                                                                                         |          |             |                                |                  |
| Interests       | Graduate School, Photography                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                         |        |                  |                                                                                         |          |             |                                |                  |
| Ethnicity       | African American / Black                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                         |        |                  |                                                                                         |          |             |                                |                  |
| #               | Name                                                               | Description                                                                                                                                                                             | Amount | Match Confidence | Organization Homepage                                                                   | Deadline | Essay (Y/N) | Letter of Recommendation (Y/N) | Test Score (Y/N) |
| 1               | BDPA Northern Virginia Chapter Scholarship                         | For African American students in the DC/NoVA area pursuing careers in Information Technology or Computer Science. Honors technical proficiency and chapter involvement.                 | Varies | High             | <a href="https://bdpa.org/">https://bdpa.org/</a>                                       |          |             |                                |                  |
| 2               | CBCF Spouses Education Scholarship                                 | Available to students in the congressional district of a CBC member (includes Stafford area). Open to graduate students of all majors; focuses on community involvement and leadership. | Varies | Medium           | <a href="https://www.cbcfinc.org/">https://www.cbcfinc.org/</a>                         |          |             |                                |                  |
| 3               | Fredericksburg-Stafford Alumni Chapter Kappa Alpha Psi Scholarship | The Kappa Foundation provides educational grants to minority male students from the                                                                                                     | Varies | High             | <a href="http://www.fredericksburgkappas.org/">http://www.fredericksburgkappas.org/</a> |          |             |                                |                  |



## Dr. Christie's Scholarship Tracking Spreadsheet

<https://www.investnothers.com/college-funding-book-templates>

Helps you **manage scholarships effectively**. It's a powerful tool for staying organized.

[illegible]

## Staying on Top of Deadlines with the Spreadsheet



### Time Management:



Use the **spreadsheet** to create a timeline for applications



Set **reminders** for upcoming deadlines



**Break down tasks** into smaller, manageable steps

### Prioritization:



Identify scholarships with the highest award amounts and best fit



Focus your efforts on the most promising opportunities

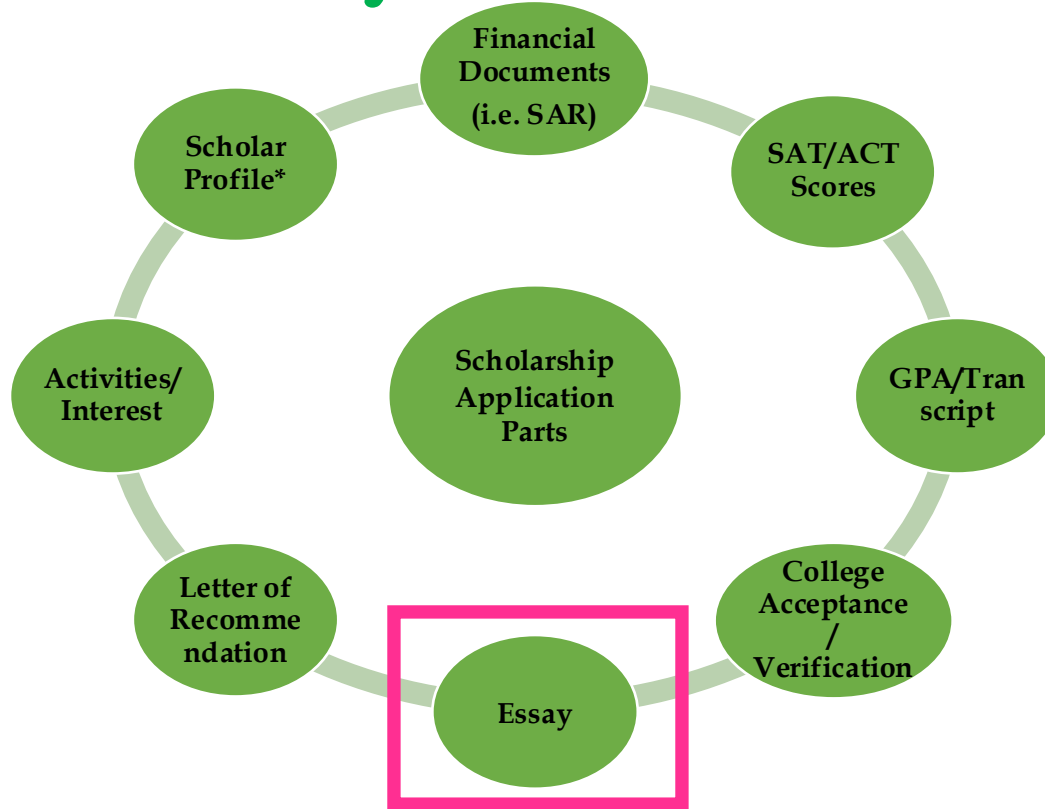


Avoid spreading yourself too thin

# **Applying for Scholarships**

# *Scholarship Application Parts*

**Essays Are Critical!**



# ***Scholarship Application Guidance***

- ❖ Read the scholarship application instructions thoroughly.
- ❖ Follow the instructions (word counts, deadlines, essays, LORs).
- ❖ Submit the scholarship application ON TIME!
- ❖ Save all content **BUT** customize your applications to the scholarship.
- ❖ Focus on writing a compelling essay.



# ***Writing a Compelling Essay***





# Scholarship Essays Matter!



**Stand out** from other applicants.



**Tell your story** in a compelling way.



Demonstrate **self-awareness** and passion.



Share how you want to **make a difference** (community, society, etc.).

# The Power of AI in Scholarship Success

If used appropriately, AI can be your secret weapon! It helps you:



**Amplify** your  
unique qualities



**Refine** essays to  
highlight your strengths



**Find** relevant  
scholarships quickly



**Organize** application  
materials efficiently





# Using AI Tools: Ethical and Effective Practices



Use AI responsibly:



Ensure **originality**: Don't plagiarize!



**Fact-check AI content**: Verify information.



**Avoid over-reliance**: AI is a tool, not a replacement for your brain.

## Maintaining Your Authenticity with AI



Your authentic voice matters!



Use AI to **enhance**, not replace, your personal stories.



**Preserve** your genuine voice and perspective.



Let your **personality** shine through.



Create your **narrative** or approach before leveraging AI.

# Avoiding Over-Reliance on AI in Essays



## Critical Thinking

- ✓ Always **evaluate** AI-generated suggestions critically.
- ✓ Don't accept AI content at face value; **fact check!**
- ✓ Ensure your essay reflects your own **independent thinking, voice, and experiences.**



## Creativity

- ➔ Use AI as a tool to **spark** your creativity, not replace it.
- ➔ Embrace your own **unique ideas** and insights.
- ➔ Avoid becoming overly dependent on AI for content generation.



# Breaking Down Scholarship Essay Prompts

## Understanding the Question



Identify the **key words** and **themes** in the prompt to understand what the scholarship committee is looking for. Brainstorm relevant **experiences** and **insights** to gather ideas.

## Answering All Parts



Address every aspect of the prompt fully, providing specific **examples** to support your claims. Stay **focused** and avoid rambling to maintain **clarity** and coherence.



# Essay Prompt

"The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you **faced a challenge**, setback, or failure. How did it **affect you**, and **what did you learn** from the experience?" *2025-2026 Common App Prompt*



## Understand the Question

- Demonstrate self-awareness.
- Ability to adapt to different situations.



## Answer All Parts

- Explain your challenge.
- Share how it affected you.
- Discussed what you learned.

Write a few sentences  
Use Google Slides or MS Word

# Crafting Your Personal Narrative

## Key Elements:

- A **compelling opening** that grabs the reader's attention.
- Clear **challenges** you've overcome.
- Significant **achievements** that demonstrate your potential.
- Alignment of your **goals** with the scholarship's mission.



# Using AI for Brainstorming Ideas

## Generating Ideas

- Use AI to explore different angles on the essay prompt.
- Identify potential themes and topics, and get inspiration for your opening and closing statements.
- This can help broaden your perspective and uncover new possibilities.



## Maintaining Originality

- Use AI-generated ideas as a starting point, not the final product.
- Infuse your essay with your own unique voice and experiences.
- Avoid simply copying and pasting AI content to ensure authenticity.





# Refining Essay Structure with AI

## Enhancing Clarity



- ✓ Ask AI to summarize your main points and identify areas where your essay is unclear or confusing.
- ✓ Revise and rewrite those sections for better understanding and precision.

## Improving Coherence



- ➡ Use AI to create a **logical flow** of ideas, ensuring each paragraph connects to the **overall theme** of the essay.
- ➡ Use transition words to guide the reader through your argument and maintain a smooth narrative.

Human

# AI Brainstorming, Enhancing, & Refining Tools

## Google Gemini



- Great to assist with brainstorming
- Used for paraphrasing
- Research tool
- Integration with Google apps

Website: <https://gemini.google.com/>

## Claude



- Ethical writing.
- Paraphrasing
- Summarizing and analysis.

Website: [www.claude.ai](http://www.claude.ai)

## Perplexity



- Provides accurate, trusted
- Used for paraphrasing
- Summarizing from multiple sources.
- Provides inline citations.

Website: [www.perplexity.ai](http://www.perplexity.ai)



# Enhancing Grammar and Style Without Losing Voice

## Overview:



### Proofreading with AI

- Use AI to identify and correct grammar errors, typos, and punctuation mistakes.
- Ensure your essay is polished and professional.



### Style Suggestions

- Use AI to suggest alternative word choices and sentence structures.
- Avoid overly complex language that obscures your message.
- Keep your phrasing natural and authentic.

# AI Grammar Tools

## Grammarly

(<https://www.grammarly.com>)



Grammar, spelling checker



Tone and clarity suggestions



Plagiarism Checker



AI Checker

## QuillBot

(<https://quillbot.com/>)



Paraphrasing



Summarizing



Grammar Checker

# Get Help with Proofreading



-  • **Never submit** an essay that was not proofread by someone other than you.
-  • **Find a trusted person** to review your essay to gain different perspectives.
-  • **Minimizing Blind Spots:**
  - Identify areas where your essay is **unclear or confusing**.
  - Combine AI insights with personal feedback for a **stronger, more persuasive essay**.



# Final Checklist for Winning Scholarship Essays



## Authenticity:

- Does your essay reflect your **true self**?
- Does it convey your **unique voice** and perspective?

## Structure:

- Is your essay **well-organized** and easy to follow?
- Does it have a clear **introduction, body, and conclusion**?

## Grammar:

- Is your essay **free** of grammatical errors and typos?
- Is it **polished** and professional?

## Responsiveness to Prompt:

- Does your essay **fully answer** the prompt?
- Does it address all aspects of the question?

## Alignment with Scholarship Goals:

- Does your essay demonstrate your **passion** for the scholarship's mission?
- Does it showcase your **potential** to contribute to the field, community or society?



# Closing

## Key Points



Use AI as a **companion** or tool. Use AI **ethically** and **effectively** to support your applications.



Organize your scholarship search with **Dr. Christie's Scholarship Tracking Spreadsheet**.



**Strengthen** your essays while keeping your **authentic voice**.



Remember to always **credit** your **sources** and maintain **academic integrity**.



## Recommended AI Tools



Grammarly



Perplexity



Claude



Quillbot

# Resources



## HiddenGems \$cholarship Finder App:

<https://www.investnothers.com/hiddengems>



## Scholarship Tracking Spreadsheet:

<https://www.investnothers.com/college-funding-book-templates>



## Book & Workbooks:

[www.investnothers.com/shop](http://www.investnothers.com/shop)





# Stay Connected



**Facebook Group**  
Scholarship for Scholars



**Instagram**  
@ScholarshipsforScholars



**TikTok**  
@docchristie



**YouTube**  
@investnothers6550



# Questions?



*Dr. Christie Wilson*

Investnothers18@gmail.com

www.investNothers.com