How to ACE your College and Scholarship Applications

College and scholarship selection committees review thousands of applications each year from qualified applicants. Below are some ways to ensure that your application stands out:

Academics

Obviously, academics are a critical part of college and scholarship selection processes. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Keep a strong academic record. Grades aren't everything, but they do matter.
- Follow a college preparatory curriculum in high school – AP, IB and honors courses (if offered by your school) are a great way to prepare for your future goals. If your school does not offer these courses, take the most challenging courses available to you or seek opportunities to obtain credits through local colleges.
- Take four years of the core subjects – English, science, math and social studies.
- Select meaningful electives that reflect your interests and goals.
- Take the ACT & SAT – Plan ahead, study, practice and take them more than once to improve your score.

Community Service

Involvement in your community plays a crucial role in selection processes since it shows that you have a sense of responsibility, commitment and interest outside of the classroom. When describing your community service activities, remember to include:

- The depth of your participation – Explain your roles and responsibilities and describe their value and importance to the organization.
- The length of your commitment – Be clear when describing the time commitment associated with the activity. Was it a one-time event, or has it become a regular part of your schedule? How frequently do you participate and for how long each time?
- Leadership and initiative – Selection committees want to identify people who will be leaders on their campuses. Describe how you assumed leadership roles, initiated projects or led others through your volunteer efforts.
- Be specific and detailed in your descriptions to ensure selection committees understand exactly what you did and how you contributed to the organization.

Extracurricular Activities

Describing your extracurricular activities allows you to tell the selection committees about all of the amazing things with which you have been involved. Other than academics and community service, extracurricular activities include nearly everything else you spend your time doing. You'll want to:

- Consider your involvement with the arts, athletics, school clubs and organizations, civic groups, work, internships, summer programs, hobbies and special interests.
- Select activities based on your true interests, talents and passion, not just because you think they'll look good on a resume.
- Describe the depth of your participation – What did you do? How did you contribute? Give details and paint a picture of your value to the organization.
- What was the length of your commitment? How much time did you spend each week with the activity? How many weeks per year were you involved?
- What leadership or initiative did you exhibit? Be specific and detailed when describing your involvement on an application.

Following the ACE guidelines, use this outline to organize your activities before completing college and scholarship applications. Similar to most application forms you will see, space is limited, so choose your words carefully when describing your activities and remember to be specific and detailed in your descriptions. If you find that specific areas are completely blank, you may want to concentrate more of your efforts on activities in that particular category. Competitive candidates show involvement in all three of these important areas.

Academics

When preparing this section, it may be useful to obtain an unofficial transcript from your high school so you have accurate information.

GPA:_____Class Rank:_____ in a class of _____Best SAT/ACT Score:_____/_____

Advanced Coursework (Honors, College Prep, AP Courses, IB Courses, etc.):

Course / Description	9	10	11	12	Course / Description	9	10	11	12

Academic Awards or Honors:

Name/ Description	9	10	11	12	Name / Description	9	10	11	12

Community Service

Service activity name & organization	9	10	11	12	HOURS PER WEEK	WEEKS PER YEAR	CONTRIBUTIONS, LEADERSHIP, HONORS, ACTIVITIES

Extracurricular Activities

Activity name & organization	9	10	11	12	HOURS PER WEEK	WEEKS PER YEAR	CONTRIBUTIONS, LEADERSHIP, HONORS, ACTIVITIES

Preparing for College: It's Never too Soon

Freshman year: Plan for the future and explore passions

- Introduce yourself to your counselor.
- Register for courses in academic areas (English, math, science, social studies and foreign language) required for college entrance.
- Do well academically! Remember, ninth grade sets the stage for your academic performance in high school and is the first set of grades college admissions officers will see on your transcript.
- Explore your extracurricular opportunities and begin to get involved in activities that are meaningful to you. Join clubs, participate in school activities and volunteer for service organizations that match your interests.

Sophomore year: Begin to deepen your experiences

- Become involved and committed to a community service organization or project.
- Deepen your involvement in several extracurricular activities to broaden your experience and help you build relationships with other students and with faculty.
- Meet with your guidance counselor and make sure you're on target with the right courses.
- Register for the PLAN test, which will help identify academic and career interests. Take a practice SAT - Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT).

Junior year: Test, inquire and lead

- Take on leadership roles in extracurricular and community service activities, or take the initiative to create your own organization or project. (Start to look for ways you can impact your organizations through your skills and leadership.)
- Enter the PSAT/NMSQT competition. Top scorers often qualify for college scholarships.
- Create a tentative list of colleges for consideration and contact them to request information or get on their mailing lists to receive information about the schools.
- Attend college fairs and workshops and review college catalogs and guides.
- Take the ACT and SAT. Remember that you can take these exams more than once and many students improve their scores the second and even third time around.
- Take the SAT II tests if required by colleges on your list.
- Remember to request that your scores be sent to schools and scholarship providers that you are interested in.
- Visit college campuses and take campus tours during summer break (or sooner).
- Carefully consider various summer job and volunteer work opportunities.
- Search for and prepare to apply for scholarships (summer prior to senior year).

Senior year: Apply/visit/confirm – Grow/sustain

- Continue involvement and leadership in extracurricular activities and community service.
- Think about ways to leave a legacy in these organizations and ensure that impact is sustainable after you leave.
- Take/retake ACT/SAT or SAT II tests if you would like to improve your scores.
- Narrow college choices to three-to-four colleges, including a "back-up" school in case top choices do not work out. (Attending college fairs/workshops can be helpful in this process.)
- Request admissions applications or download the necessary forms online, apply for admission and establish relationships with admissions counselors at the schools to which you apply. During the application process:
    - Prepare a personal essay.
    - Contact teachers/counselors about writing letters of recommendation.
    - Fill out a FAFSA form (opens in October).
    - Apply for scholarships (each has its own deadline).
    - Consider admission offers, and confirm your intent to enroll.
    - Take Advanced Placement Tests.
    - Request that a final transcript be sent to your college of choice and ensure that your college receives it.

Tips for Writing a Successful Scholarship Application

Adhere to deadlines

- For online applications, ensure that you allow yourself enough time to deal with unexpected technical issues.
- For printed applications, pay attention to whether it is a "postmarked" or "received by" deadline.
- Submit your application well before the deadline to leave time for follow-up if necessary.
- If others are mailing or submitting information on your behalf, make sure they also know the deadline and follow up with them to make sure their materials are submitted on time.

Follow directions

- Verify the format for application submissions. Most likely this will be online.
- Online applications will likely have a word or character limit. Make sure you don't go over it, or your answers may be cut off.
- Many printed applications will outline space and length requirements, tell you if they prefer/accept handwritten applications vs. typed applications, require you to use the application forms they provide, accept supplemental material like resumes, news clippings, etc. Read the instructions carefully and pay attention to these specifics.

Be neat and complete

- Copy or print a blank application to practice rough drafts before you fill out the actual application.
- Some online applications may time out after a certain amount of time. Avoid this by completing the application in another program and pasting your answers into the application.
- Use correct grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- Indicate not applicable "N/A" rather than leaving any section completely blank.

Be specific and detailed about your past achievements

- Since your application will be read and scored based on the stated criteria, make sure you have addressed them throughout the application.
- While every space does not need to be filled, make sure each entry is specific and detailed.
- Instead of writing "Prom committee," try "Designed 3-month advertising campaign for prom."
- Instead of just "Volunteer," try "Organized yearly bingo night for more than 100 senior citizens."
- Most importantly, be honest. Don't invent or embellish your accomplishments.

Look over everything again

- Did you explain how you fulfill the selection criteria and why you're a good candidate?
- Proofread! Have a few people read the application for clarity and mechanics.
- Keep a copy of everything for your records. Many interview questions come from the application, so keeping a copy to review before an interview can be helpful. As you fill out subsequent applications, it can also be helpful to refer to those you have already completed.

Essays and short answers

- Answer the question/prompt and remember the selection criteria in your response.
- Be personal and descriptive. The readers want to get to know you and your experiences.
- Be organized and concise, demonstrating the critical thought you have given your application and your ability to articulate your thoughts clearly and effectively.

Recommendations

- Ask recommenders approximately four weeks before you need a letter.
- Provide a resume and encourage recommenders to focus on how you fulfill the selection criteria.
- Follow up to remind writers about the deadline and ask if they need any more information.
- Write a thank you note to the person for his/her time and help in the application process.

Tips for Writing an Exceptional Application Essay

A Great Essay Will

- Provide insight into who you are and what you value.
- Be personal and unique in a way that highlights your identity and/or personality.
- Have a certain depth of purpose.
- Engage the reader.
- Leave an impression on the reader.
- Challenge the reader to consider a subject, topic or opinion in a different light.
- Speak to the scholarship's selection criteria (in our case, academic ability/curiosity, service, initiative/leadership and character).
- Have gone through several edits and revisions.
- Follow instructions and respond to the essay prompt.
- Make a reading committee want to meet you in person.

Some General Tips

Length

You should ensure that the essay is an appropriate length (one paragraph is way too short for a question that requests a 1-page response). At the same time, you should not exceed the maximum page, word or character allowance.

Topic

Ensure that your essay topic is creative and relevant, and that it speaks to the question. The best topics are those about which you are innately passionate. It is easy to write with sincerity when a topic is chosen for your distinctive appreciation (or condemnation) of it.

Tone

Read your essay aloud to ensure that the tone you desire comes across in the final product. This can help you determine if your sarcasm or humor is likely to be misinterpreted, if your emphasis is unintentionally melodramatic, if your sincerity rings true, etc.

Format

Remember to use separate paragraphs to create distinctive sections in the essay and distinguish ideas from each other. An essay that is one long paragraph instead of being broken up into different points can be difficult to read, and readers may get lost. Follow instructions regarding point-size, font, etc. Not doing so is a sign of carelessness.

Some Specific Tips

Essays About Other People

If writing about a special person (from your own experience or a famous or historical figure), you should relate this person to your own life, goals or aspirations. If you don't provide some information as to why you chose this person to write about, the essay becomes a biography of someone else without any insight into why you find your subject compelling or admirable.

Essays About Challenges

This type of essay is most effective when it provides insight into who you are by describing the challenge and illustrating why it was important to you to attempt to overcome it. Describe the actions taken to work towards your desired result and tell your reader what you learned from the experience or how the experience changed you.

Boettcher Scholarship Interview Tips

Be yourself

There are no "right" answers to any of the questions - we are not trying to trick you. We just want to get to know you in person, beyond what we have read on paper. Let your unique talents and interests shine!

Keep the selection criteria in mind

Our selection criteria are 1) Superior Scholastic Ability, 2) Evidence of Leadership and Involvement, 3) Service to Community and School and 4) Outstanding Character. The interview committee will be asking questions and scoring holistically based on the selection criteria. Previous scores from our prescreening and screening processes are not considered; so all finalists begin the interview process on an even playing field.

Review your application

Unlike the application, we do not use a fixed set of questions; every interview is different. Most of the questions will be generated from your application, which the committee will read in advance and may refer to during your interview. Try to imagine the types of questions they might ask based on your application.

Be prepared to discuss your goals for college and beyond

While the committee is aware that future plans may change with time and experience, think about your future and be prepared to talk about some of the options you are considering.

Pause to think before answering

There is no need to feel rushed. Think about the question and how best to share your strengths, experiences and talents. Strike a balance between elaborating on questions and being concise.

Employ your best communication skills

Speak loudly and clearly and make eye contact with the committee. Try to avoid verbal pauses such as "umm" or "like." This may sound difficult, especially if you are shy or nervous. Simply remember to be yourself and make the most of your short opportunity to shine for the committee. If you can relax and enjoy yourself during the interview, the committee members will enjoy themselves as well.

Do some homework

Obviously, we care deeply about the Boettcher Foundation and its scholarship program and grants. We want to know that you care about our scholarship and are interested in attending a Colorado school, even if you have not yet decided to do so. Spend a few hours reading the information on the foundation website: boettcherfoundation.org.

Have a mock interview

Ask your counselor, teacher, principal, parent or a community member to help you coordinate a mock interview. Emulate the real interview as much as possible; try to have a committee of people you don't know. Let them read the letter you received as a finalist, these tips and your application so they understand the type of interview we will be conducting and can ask questions accordingly. Most importantly, allow time after the mock interview to get their feedback.

Dress appropriately

Wear something you would wear to receive an award that is important or special to you; it should be comfortable but something that shows you care about this opportunity.

Resources for Financial Aid Information

Free Application for Financial Aid (FAFSA)

All colleges and universities require their students to fill out the FAFSA to be considered for financial aid. You can complete an application at your own pace on the internet and can easily check the status of it later.

- Before completing the FAFSA online, you must obtain a FSA ID at fsaid.ed.gov.
- With your FSA ID, go to fafsa.ed.gov. The FAFSA website also has useful information about other financial aid programs offered by the government.
- Financial aid is distributed on a first-come, first-served basis. Fill out the application as soon as possible. Applications open in October. The federal deadline for submitting your FAFSA is June 30. You can change the information later if necessary.
- If you prefer to receive a paper FAFSA form, call 1.800.4.FED.AID. You can also request other federal publications, such as "Funding Education Beyond High School" and receive help with questions and concerns.

Free Scholarship Searches and Internet Resources

While numerous companies offer scholarship search services for a fee, you can find all of the same information yourself with a little bit of work. Some good places to start searching are:

- Princeton Review: princetonreview.com
- Scholarships.com: scholarships.com
- Fastweb: fastweb.com

Other Useful Sites

- finaid.org: You can estimate your EFC (Estimated Family Contribution) now to plan ahead financially. Includes links to scholarship searches, colleges financial aid pages, student loan information and more.
- scholarsnapp.org: Allows students to apply for scholarships online and then automatically re-use that information for other scholarship applications without retyping their data again and again.
- nasfaa.org: The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators web site gives general information on aid. Look under the tab "Parents & Students." The site also includes links to other information pages, including NCAA regulations.
- studentaid.ed.gov: The U.S. Department of Education site supplies information on Federal Student Aid programs, including maximum awards and eligibility.
- collegeboard.org: The College Board provides general information, registration and test dates for the SAT.
- actstudent.org: This site has information on the ACT, including dates, practice tests and financial aid.
- salliemae.com: Sallie Mae presents good general information, a general, step-by-step financial aid application process explanation and information on student loans.
- collegeincolorado.org: Here you will find information on student services for the colleges and universities in Colorado, test preparation, career options, higher education opportunities, college planning tools and more.
- bigfuture.collegeboard.org: Designed with the input of students and educators, this site's step-by-step approach will make the college planning process easier to navigate.

Books

There are hundreds of books about college scholarships. Here are some to get you started:

- The Boettcher Foundation's book, *All the Wisdom and None of the Junk: Secrets of Applying for College Admission and Scholarships*, available at boettcherfoundation.org/scholarship-book.
- Colorado Council on High School/College Relations, Colorado Collegiate Handbook – best for in-state information. To order, see your counselor or visit coloradocouncil.org.
- The College Board Scholarship Handbook
- Peterson's College Money Handbook

The Top 5 Reasons to Stay in Colorado for College

Location, location, location

Thousands of out-of-state students flock to Colorado for college. Even more young people are moving to Colorado after college. People can't resist living in close proximity to the Rocky Mountains. Our state's beautiful weather, outdoor lifestyle, and numerous athletic and cultural experiences make it one of the hottest destinations for young professionals. Employers are noticing, and many startups and existing companies are choosing to locate in Colorado, offering boundless opportunities for professional advancement.

Distance is relative. College is as far away from home (or as close) as you want it to be, and staying in-state will only enhance your social, academic and extracurricular opportunities – not hinder them.

Colorado colleges and universities offer a wealth of opportunities

There are numerous options within Colorado when it comes to choosing a college. You can choose a high-quality public or private education; learn on a block, semester or quarter system; study abroad for a semester or year anywhere around the world; live in a metropolitan area or college town; receive a liberal arts or science-based education – it's all here!

Colorado schools such as the University of Colorado Boulder, Colorado College, Colorado State University, Colorado School of Mines, University of Denver, Regis University and the University of Northern Colorado boast many elite academic, leadership and internship programs. In fact, Colorado is home to one of the nation's only statewide leadership programs – the Colorado Leadership Alliance (CLA).

Staying in-state is cost effective

Generally speaking, attending an in-state college or university is going to be kinder to your pocketbook (allowing you extra funding for graduate school, study abroad or other opportunities). More and more high-achieving students are choosing to stay in-state for their undergraduate career. Those who wish to attend school out-of-state are increasingly looking to do so for graduate school.

It's more about you than the school

The bottom line is where you go to school is less important than what you *do* in school. You write your own college success story – why not write your success story in Colorado where the personalized approach of our colleges and universities can help you distinguish yourself?

The Boettcher Scholarship

The Boettcher Scholarship offers a four-year, practically full-ride scholarship to the Colorado school of your choice (that means any four-year public or private college/university). In addition, the Boettcher Scholarship has a lot of extra perks! Beyond financial support, the Boettcher Scholarship offers students the opportunity to study abroad (through the international education grant), further scholastic opportunities (provided by enrichment grants) and a lifetime of connections, support and prospects as a member of the Boettcher Scholar community.

Colorado Opportunities

There are amazing opportunities right in your own backyard, here in Colorado. Below are a few of the highlights from some of Colorado's colleges and universities that are currently hosting Boettcher Scholars.

Colorado College, www.coloradocollege.edu

Colorado College students experience intensive learning that expands through and beyond the Rocky Mountain West. CC's Block Plan allows students to dive into small discussion-based classes for three and a half weeks with professors who know them, then relax or explore over a four-day block break. Students will find challenging interdisciplinary majors like race, ethnicity and migration studies, organismal biology and ecology, international political economy, and film and media studies. Be part of a vibrant, diverse community where students communicate, debate, defend, think and engage.

Colorado School of Mines, www.mines.edu

As Orediggers, CSM students pursue a top-notch education in the applied sciences, engineering or economics that prepares them to be leaders and innovators in their fields. Students can participate in the interdisciplinary First Year Honors Experience that leads to the McBride Honors Program, tailor a study abroad experience specifically to their degree program, apply themselves in excellent undergraduate research and internship opportunities and leverage the benefits of a small school environment to solve the world's big challenges.

Colorado State University, www.colostate.edu

At CSU, students are part of something bigger than themselves. Rams tackle a range of challenges to improve the health and well-being of animals, people and our planet. With more than 70 majors and 130 concentrations, 200+ study abroad programs, hundreds of undergraduate research opportunities and a leadership minor, CSU offers its diverse student population countless opportunities to pursue their passion in business, engineering, and the sciences, arts and humanities.

University of Colorado Boulder, www.colorado.edu

The cornerstones of a CU Boulder experience are innovative academics, research and rigorous courses that prepare students for a complex global society. World-renowned faculty maintain a reputation for excellence in research, creative work and teaching across 150 academic fields. From hands-on learning to close connections with faculty, funding for research, scholarly or creative work to honors programs, 400+ study abroad opportunities and residential academic programs, CU prepares students to become leaders within Colorado and throughout the world.

University of Denver, www.du.edu

The University of Denver provides large university resources with small college attention. DU's quarter system lets students explore a wide range of academic majors, minors and concentrations. It offers experiential interterm courses, research and internship opportunities, and a top-ranked study abroad program with no additional cost. Close to downtown, DU students have access to excellent professional and cultural opportunities. DU is a private university dedicated to the public good, and with the support of dynamic, engaged faculty and a choice of innovative programs, DU students transform their passion into purpose.