

## Gathering Reference Letters

Think carefully about who you ask to write you a reference letter. You probably don't want to ask the teacher who remembers you for always being late to class and texting on your phone instead of paying attention.

If possible, ask people who know you in different ways (a teacher from a course that you excelled in, a coach/staff advisor, someone who has worked with you as a volunteer, etc) so that the letters can touch on all of your strengths.

Be clear about what the person should do with the letter – say when you will return to collect it or provide a stamped, addressed envelope for the letter to be sent in. You should not expect a person doing you the favour of writing a reference letter to have to put extra work in to hunt you down and give you the letter.

When you ask someone to write you a reference letter, have two things ready to give them:

- (1) a written description of the scholarship/bursary (especially if there are certain qualifications you are supposed to have that could be mentioned in the letter)
- (2) a copy of your resume so that details the person might not know can be worked in (a teacher might know how you volunteer as a Shared Reader but not as a Sunday School aide and being able to mention that extra volunteering could help make a stronger letter)

Give anyone writing you a letter at least a week to write the letter for you. Rushed letters tend to be poor letters that won't help your case.

Consider asking an "extra" person to write you a reference letter so that you have a back up if someone doesn't get the letter done on time (or so that you can choose which letter(s) do the best job supporting your application)

**Don't forget to say thank you** – reference letters often take a few hours out of a busy person's life. It's also nice to let the people who wrote the letters for you know how things turned out (Did MtA give you a \$2000 entrance scholarship? Did you make it to the next level of consideration for the Schulich scholarship?)

## *How Would You Describe Yourself?*

Are you a "people person"?

- Work well in groups
- Have a positive outlook
- Focused on having everyone's voice heard

Are you a hard worker?

- Self-motivated
- Have high personal standards or expectations
- Put in consistent effort to achieve results

Are you a leader?

- Outgoing
- Have a vision for success
- Focused on building consensus

Are you a perfectionist?

- Detail-oriented
- Focused on end goals
- Well-prepared for tasks

Are you artistic?

- Creative
- Think outside the box
- Challenge traditional roles/assumptions

Are you athletic?

- Energetic and dedicated
- Team-player
- Use benchmarks to measure progress

Are you ...?

- Confident in your abilities
- Invested in growing as a person
- Adaptable / able to deal with change
- Open-minded?
- Responsible, ethical, reliable, etc?

## Characteristics / Experiences to Consider Highlighting

Education  
Volunteering & Community Service  
Leadership Experiences  
Involvement in School and Community  
(Extra-Curricular Activities)  
Achievements and Awards  
Certifications  
Employment History

# Preparing Your Scholarship/ Bursary Application



## General Considerations

Get yourself a “mature” email address to use (one that is based on your name). You want it to be obvious to a person who has to get in touch with you which email address is yours. Not to mention, people giving away money want to feel that it is a good investment and the email address “partyanimal98@email.com” doesn’t make a great first impression to support the idea of being a good investment.

Stuck trying to create a new email address to use? Try ...

- First initial\_ middle initial\_ last name  
john\_k\_smith@email.com or john.k.smith@email.com
- Last name\_ first name (or first initial, middle initial  
smith\_jk@email.com or smith.j.k@email.com
- First initial, middle initial, and the consonants of your last name  
jksmith@email.com

To have a clean, professional look, aim to have anything you type/print/submit resemble a newspaper article:

Avoid using “cute” fonts (like Comic Sans MS or anything that looks like it was hand-written). Times New Roman, Arial, Georgia, and Bookman Old Style are all good choices.

Justify your margins (instead of the default hanging margins). The average person will see this as more professional-looking

Except for headings, fonts should never be smaller than 11pt or larger than 14pt.

Think carefully about when you will use bolding, underlining, or italics. Be consistent in your usage (if one header is bolded then all headers should be bolded) but don’t over-do it.

Make a rough draft first and ask one or two other people to look it over for you. At the very least, print out your rough draft and re-read it after a few days when you have fresh eyes.

If you are filling something in with pen, use blue or black ink. And if you make a mistake, use white-out — don’t scratch out unless you are specifically asked not to use white-out.

**Also, this is a good time of your life to re-think your privacy settings and what you share on social media. Is there anything online that a selection committee could find that would contradict the image of yourself that you are presenting?**

## Writing a Cover Letter

**BE HONEST** — making claims which are not true might not only cost you the scholarship, it might cost you a place at the college/university.

The purpose of your cover letter is to help present the rest of your application in the right light to give you a leg up on the competition. Before you start writing the letter, decide what personal qualities or experiences you want to use the letter to highlight and keep those in mind as you write. Use your cover letter to address any concerns that the committee might have — ie if your marks in grade 11 were lower than usual because you were in a car accident and missed time during your recovery.

Use the same “header” with your name and contact information that you used on your resume so that they clearly belong together.

Include a greeting to whoever is reading the letter — “To the Ladies and Gentlemen of the (Award Name) Selection Committee” is a pretty safe choice.

In your opening paragraph, establish what you feel your application demonstrates and why you deserve the scholarship/bursary. Skip introducing yourself by name since your name is already on the cover letter as a header.

If the scholarship/bursary has specific requirements, make sure that your letter addresses each of these requirements and how you meet them. Use specific details/examples to back up your claim and aim to include a few details that are not included on your resume. If the scholarship/bursary is more general, use the paragraphs of your cover letter to highlight your personal strengths. Remember that actions speak louder than words — so whenever possible, focus on things that you have done or accomplished which illustrate what kind of a person you are and how you are the best candidate for the scholarship/award.

Write your letter from a positive perspective: avoid any language or statements that could be seen as complaining.

Include a conclusion that summarizes the main points of your letter and thanks the reader for their consideration.

Don’t forget to sign the letter — in blue or black ink.

## Creating A Resume

Your resume should be very straight-forward and easy to read; it is appropriate to use bulleted lists instead of full sentences so long as you use proper grammar.

Open your resume with a 1-2 sentence description of yourself that draws attention to your strengths (which should then be supported by the rest of your resume). When appropriate, tailor this description to what you are applying for — if a scholarship will be awarded to a student with strong leadership qualities, describe yourself as a leader and back this up with one or two ways that you demonstrate leadership capabilities.

In general, your resume should not be more than two pages long — trim out the things that aren’t relevant to what you are applying for.

Your name and contact information should be at the top of each page, and take the time to format this to stand out (centred on the page; your name should be in a larger font than anything else and perhaps a different font)

Take a few moments to tailor your resume categories to what you are applying for. For one scholarship you might include a section about activities that have allowed you to demonstrate an interest in performing arts; for a job application you probably wouldn’t include a performing arts section.

Unless it is an activity that you are still involved in or a truly outstanding achievement that no one else in the province can claim, don’t include things from junior high.

Provide time frames of involvement for any activities/jobs that you list (Sept 2011 — Present, Jan — Apr 2013, etc)

Do not use acronyms and do not make assumptions about how well known a group or activity is. Where appropriate, provide a small amount of detail about each entry on your resume — this might include how many hours each week the entry represents, what your duties were, how it demonstrates/relates to a particular characteristic, etc.