How to Win Scholarships: Writing Samples

Example #1 - Introductions that hook the reader's interest

- This introductory sentence is factual but not particularly interesting.

“In April 2003, I decided that I could no longer work at my meaningless secretarial job and decided to give it up to become a teacher.”

- Making it more interesting:

“It was a beautiful April morning. As usual, I arrived to work on time, put away my purse and started typing. I never imagined that by the end of the day, I would have made a life changing decision. I was going to become a teacher! “

Example #2 - Personal stories that illustrate a point

- This sentence begs for an answer to the question, “What were your personal challenges?”

“I want to teach bilingual education because I experienced many challenges in school because my native language was not English.”

- Follow the statement with a personal story to illustrate the point being made:

“I can remember being asked to read a sentence out loud to my fourth grade classmates. I was terrified. At the time I could barely speak English much less read it. With tears in my eyes, I struggled for the words to tell my teacher that her request was impossible.”

Example #3 - Impersonal abstractions vs. a more personal, unique approach

- Below is an impersonal, abstract answer to the essay question, “How will you contribute to your chosen field?”

“Health educators can help people avoid illness and disease by providing health-related information. Knowledge about how to live a healthy lifestyle gives people the power to improve their physical, emotional and mental well being. It is exciting to think that by teaching people how to live healthier lives, there will be less suffering and pain in the world.”

- Making it more personal, unique and passionate:

“My personal commitment to living healthier has taught me so much about the choices that must be made to get to the place you want to be. I have struggled to overcome a serious weight problem and to strengthen an immune system weakened by years of stressful work habits. As a health educator, I want to help others in their journey to a better quality of life. I want to share with them what I have learned and be taught by them in return.”
Example #4 - Eliminating unnecessary phrases or sentences

- This sentence is full of unneeded words and phrases that slow the reader and make it difficult to understand what the writer really wants to say.

I volunteered to work with teenagers who were from a high needs school district located just south of downtown San Antonio near the Tower of the Americas and who needed to learn about the opportunities that a college education could provide to them as well as the doors that a college degree would open in the future.

- To edit this sentence, ask the question: “Does this word or phrase add anything to the basic idea being presented?” Can I say the same thing with fewer words?” Here is an edited version:

I volunteered to teach teenagers who were from a low-income school district located just south of downtown San Antonio near the Tower of the Americas and who needed to learn about the opportunities that a college education could provide.

- The final version:

I volunteered to teach teenagers from a high needs school district about the opportunities that a college education could provide.

Example #5 - Effectively closing the essay

- Notice how this ending paragraph leaves the reader hanging:

“In conclusion, I want to be the kind of coach that Mr. Reyes was to me. I learned so much from him about baseball. I would never have become a pitcher without him. He was the first person who helped me figure out how to strike out a batter.”

- Making it better:

“In conclusion, I want to be the kind of coach that Mr. Reyes was to me. I look forward to the day when my students will be writing their own scholarship essays and can honestly say, “If it weren’t for him, I would never have become the athlete that I am today.”