



Foreword



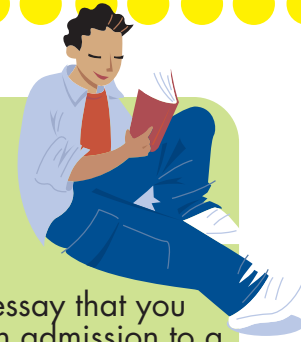
Fifteen years ago, I set out to create a scholarship program that would give students from different economic and cultural backgrounds an even chance to compete for college money. Our corporate sponsors, Riviana Foods Inc. and Univision Radio agreed that an essay contest would reveal a student's ability to think creatively and work in a disciplined way.

We decided that the winners should be determined only by the content of the essay, with no weight given to any other aspect of the student's academic experience. It was a good idea. Now I find that this idea has caught on and almost every scholarship program now requires some kind of an essay.

There are hundreds of programs and millions of dollars available, but writing takes time so the students who want to compete generally opt for one of two choices: Find a way to do without sleep or do many essays as quickly as possible and try to get lucky. I am hopeful that this "essay" can offer a third alternative.



How to Write a WINNING SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY



A "winning" essay is an essay that you must write in order to gain admission to a college or gain financial support for college. But what do you write about? What do they consider a good essay? It isn't easy to sit down and write two hundred words on which your college money could depend. But relax. It's easier than you think. It's a process. Once you learn the process, you can write a competitive essay in less time than you ever thought possible.

To be competitive your essay has to be well written. That means that it has to be well thought out. The given topic (if it is in the form of a question) probably has lots of possible answers. The people who read the essays will be looking for several ideas to support your "answer". They will also be looking for clues about the kind of person you are.

In essays and in life, your true character shows through the choices you make. Think about the question. Write the truth as you know and feel it. A snapshot of your character will be there, too. You build a house from the ground up, but you build an essay from the center out, and the center of a great essay is

The Big Idea

Here is how to find the center of your essay.

how to write a

WINNING SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY



1 FREE ASSOCIATION

If there is a given topic, take a few days and just think about it. Keep a notebook handy and write down all the ideas that come to you. You are looking for the centerpiece of your essay, the **BIG IDEA**, and for that you need to free your mind and allow the idea to arrive. Your subconscious mind will search both long and short-term memory and save the relevant facts for you.

Be sure to harvest your ideas once a day and at the same time each day. Some ideas strike like lightning. Others arrive in a gentler way. Write them all down. After three days, review what you have written. The idea you are seeking will probably be there.

Time: 10 minutes per day.
Mornings work best for me.

2 WRITE THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION

From your notes, find the idea that best answers the question posed by the topic. This is your **BIG IDEA**.

Time: 10 minutes

3 WRITE AN OUTLINE

This should be a very informal type of outline. Start by placing your **BIG IDEA** at the beginning of your outline. In the middle tell about why you chose it and why you believe it is the answer. Then add related ideas from your notes, but make sure that they are relevant and short.

Time: 20 minutes

(There is a sample outline at the end of the pamphlet)

4 WRITE THE FIRST DRAFT

The first draft is an opportunity to flesh out your good ideas and flush out everything else. Write the essay and do it in a continuous flow.

Pretend that you are writing an email to a friend. Stick to the flow of the outline you have created. Try to maintain that order. Put the draft away and don't look at it again until the next day.

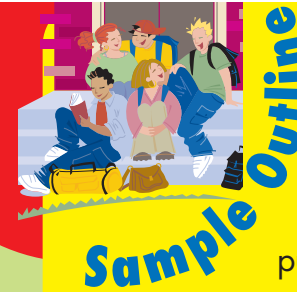
Time: 30 minutes

5 EDIT, POLISH, AND FINISH

You are now at the point when you have a central idea, some supporting ideas and a lot of excess words. Just edit out anything that doesn't belong. The strength of your **BIG IDEA** is the strength of your essay, so as long as you have clearly stated it and supported it, you are done. This is not going to be the Gettysburg Address (which, by the way, is a perfect example of a short essay with a touch of drama).

Don't forget to run a spell check.

Time: 30 minutes



Sample Outline

Here is a very informal outline based on an essay topic no longer in use. The ideas shown were all expressed in student essays. I have organized them for the purpose of demonstrating my idea of an informal outline.

TOPIC:

How Does My Being Educated Improve the Quality of Life for All Americans?

The Big Idea

We are a self-governing society. The better educated we are, the better we can govern ourselves.

SUPPORTING IDEAS:

- 1 Education will help us to evaluate and elect competent leaders.
- 2 Education tends to help people understand each other and work together.
- 3 Education decreases unemployment.
- 4 Education helps us to make decisions about how to preserve our environment.

CONCLUSION:

(The answer to the question)

My education makes me a better citizen; able to participate in government, able to be tolerant of other people who are different from me, able to support myself, and aware of my responsibility to preserve the things we all share.

ONE LAST NOTE

If you are a high school senior, you are involved in a critical phase of what is probably life's most difficult job. You are discovering who you are and learning to accept and work with your discovery. As you write, you bring out the thoughts and feelings that define you. Write your thoughts and feelings down and look at them. Get to know the really excellent person you will someday become.