QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE WRITING A PERSONAL ESSAY

***Questions about your individuality:***

* *Does any attribute, quality, or skill distinguish me from everyone else? How did I develop this attribute?*
* *What is my strongest, most unwavering personality trait?*
* *What are my favorite books, movies, and works of art? Have these influenced my life in a meaningful way?*
* *What was the most difficult time in my life, and why? How did my perspective on life change as a result?*
* *Have I ever struggled for something and succeeded? What made me successful?*
* *Have I ever struggled for something and failed? How did I respond?*
* *Have I experienced an epiphany, as if my eyes became open to something I was previously blind to?*
* *How would my friends characterize me? What would they write about if they were writing my essay for me?*
* *How have I changed/grown over the years? What caused these changes and how have they affected me?*
* *Are there any obstacles that I had to overcome and how have I dealt with these difficulties from my past?*
* *Who has influenced me over the years (e.g. parent, sibling, teacher, or friend) and in what way have they influenced me?*
* *What are my career goals? Why did I choose this career path?*
* *Why might I be a stronger candidate than others? What sets me apart from other candidates? Given a stack of similar applications, why should a committee choose me?*
* *What are my dreams for the future? When I look back on my life in thirty years, what would it take for me to consider my life successful? What people, things, and accomplishments do I need? How does this particular program/position fit into my plans for the future?*

***Questions about your field of study:***

* *When did I become interested in my field of study? Why am I interested in my field of study?*
* *What experiences confirmed that this is what I really want to study?*
* *What have I learned about my subject of interest?*
* *How has my discipline shaped me? What has my field of study taught me about myself?*
* *What am I most passionate about relative to my field? What special interests do I have within my chosen field?*

***Questions about your academic record:***

* *Are there gaps or inconsistencies on my records (transcript and/or exam scores) that I can explain?*
* *Are there any awards, recognitions, or honors that I have received that are worth mentioning?*

***Questions about your non-academic experiences:***

* *What internships and/or jobs have I had in the past? How are these experiences related to my field of interest? What have I learned from these experiences? What skills have I acquired?*
* *What extracurricular activities have I participated in and how do they contribute to my professional goals?*
* *What have I done outside of the classroom that demonstrates qualities sought after by universities or employers? Of these, which means the most to me?*
* *What are my most important campus and community activities? Why did I join these? What did I contribute?*

***Questions about the application readers and institution:***

* *What are the most compelling reasons for a committee to be interested in me?*
* *Why am I applying to this program? This institution?*
* *How will attending this graduate school/maintaining this internship/scholarship help me grow as an individual and prepare me for my career?*
* *What specific features attract me to the program? How do the qualities I bring make for a good match?*

You can also use other resources to help you discover what to write about:

**Ask for Help from Parents, Friends, Colleagues, etc.** If you struggle to characterize yourself and your personality traits do not automatically leap to mind, ask your friends to write a list of your five most salient personality traits. Ask your friends why they chose the ones they did. If an image of your personality begins to emerge, consider life experiences that could illustrate these particular traits.

**Consider your Childhood.** While scholarship committees are not interested in reading about your childhood and are more interested in the last 2-4 years of your life, you might consider events of your childhood that inspired the interests you have today. Interests that began in childhood may be the most defining parts of your life. For instance, if you were interested in math since an early age and now want to study medicine, you might incorporate this into your medical school admissions essay. Analyze the reasons for your interests and how they were shaped from your upbringing.

**Consider your Role Models.** Many applicants do not have role models or mentors and were never greatly influenced by just one or two people. However, for those who do have role models or mentors and actually aspire to become like certain people may want to incorporate a discussion of that person and their admirable traits into the essay. Many people get off track when using this theme and write about the role model and forget about themselves. Remember to keep the focus of the essay on how these people impacted you, how you have grown from having them in your life.

**Goal Determination.** Life is short. Why do you want spend 2-6 years of your life at a particular college, graduate school, or professional school? How is the degree necessary to the fulfillment of your goals? When considering goals, think broadly; few people would be satisfied with just a career. How else will your education fit your needs and lead you to a fulfilling life?

Because your personal essay can have an impact on your acceptance or rejection, it is important that you leave a valuable impression on the scholarship committee. Evaluating these questions can help you prepare an essay that is compelling and attention grabbing. Your job is to let the reader know why you should be the one that is accepted. After answering these questions, your next step is to use this information and create an organized and structured essay. Remember that the only way to write a unique essay is to have experiences that support whatever topic you come up with.

**HOW TO GET STARTED WRITING A PERSONAL ESSAY**

You want to format your personal essay in three parts:

1. ***Introduction (1 paragraph)***– Establish the purpose of your essay by communicating who you are, a positive statement about your qualifications, what you’re applying for, and a brief statement of why you’re applying for the scholarship
2. ***Body (2 paragraphs)***– Briefly explain your personal background (good or bad), emphasize the skills and abilities you possess, why pursuing a post-secondary education is important and how you will use your post-secondary education in the future, your involvement, activities, organizations, community service, etc., and why you might be set apart from the competition – other student applicants that are applying for the same scholarship you’re applying for!
3. ***Closing (1 paragraph)***– Restate your interest in applying for that scholarship, thank the scholarship committee for considering you as a candidate, and briefly rehash your post-secondary education goal, your commitment to that goal, and why you need their money.

The standard and most recommended personal essay format is normally ***one page, double spaced, 12 font***.

Once a student completes their personal essay, they can have one of the following to look it over:

1. ***TeamMates Mentor***
2. ***English teacher***
3. ***Librarian***
4. ***School Counselor***
5. ***Community Leader***
6. ***Parent/Guardian, older sibling***