

COVER LETTER DO'S & DO NOT'S

When well-crafted and targeted to the scholarship opportunity, a cover letter can give you a significant edge over the competition. Don't miss this chance to make a strong first impression and set yourself apart from other contenders. A well written cover letter will make the committee want to review your resume.

- **Avoid a generic salutation**
If possible, don't start your note with "To whom it may concern" or "Dear sir or madam." Instead, address it directly to the scholarship committee or chairperson (if possible). Addressing the letter to a specific individual will demonstrate both motivation and resourcefulness.
- **Keep it focused**
Scholarship committee members don't want to read a novel, so limit your note to two or three short paragraphs. Explain why you are the most qualified applicant and what qualities you can bring to the program. Your interest in rock climbing isn't applicable unless you are applying for a scholarship that caters to sports enthusiasts, for example.
- **Customize the content**
It's important to target each letter to the actual scholarship. You can determine which accomplishments to focus on by looking at the scholarship guidelines. For example, if you are applying for a scholarship that focuses on leadership, play up your interpersonal skills and previous leadership experience and successes. Expand upon one or two key points from your résumé -- perhaps how you helped a team or group succeed-- to better key into the potential scholarship committee needs.
- **Showcase your top assets**
There's a fine line between confidence and cockiness. Saying you are the best "Student Athlete in the history of BHS" is less effective than explaining how your work ethic, dedication and commitment to excellence has help both you and your team.
- **Address any concerns**
The cover letter also is a place to address any issues that may give a scholarship committee pause, such as gaps in your gpa or extra-curricular involvement. If this applies to you, briefly explain the situation without over doing it.
- **Be honest**
Don't stretch the truth about your accomplishments. Even seemingly minor misrepresentations -- saying you pursued the most rigorous curriculum at BHS when really you took only a couple of advanced classes for example -- can come back to haunt you.
- **Check for errors**
A sure way to take yourself out of the running for a scholarship is to have a typo or grammatical mistake in your cover letter. Ask a trusted friend or family member to review the document before you send it out. Many scholarship committee members have told me that typos, spelling errors, grammatical errors and general lack of neatness has caused them to reject an application.
- **Sign the letter**
Sign the cover letter in blue or black ink. Make copies of the letter but be sure that the signature is original.