

Getting the YES: Crafting the ultimate scholarship application

As compiled from actual scholarship reviewers

Who wants money for college? *Everyone*. Here are some helpful tips to make your scholarship application stand out in the stack.

- **Make your essay unique and specific.**

No reviewer wants to read anything recycled. Your essay must be a direct answer to that particular question or prompt. For example, if the question is “How have you beat the odds?”, reviewers are looking for that particular restatement: “I beat the odds by ...” A good sample formula: define your odd, describe how you overcame it, talk about what your life is like now, then explore where you could go next. Think past, present, future.

- **Get to know the organization.**

Organizations and foundations love when you do your research. Read a little on their Web site and see what they're about. If you can tie your personal statement to the mission or purpose of the foundation, reviewers will remember your application.

With *Beat the Odds*, alumni are frequently called upon to serve as spokespeople for CDF and what we represent. This potential role may come into the conversation to determine if the candidate is a good fit for the scholarship or not.

- **Make it personal and tell YOUR story.**

This is your chance to show reviewers exactly who you are and why you'd be the best recipient of this award. How can you bring your story to life? What drives you? What things can you say to make you stand out from other applicants? Keep it real and honest. Use your voice and your perspective, and be appropriately transparent.

If you're after a superlative recommendation from a mentor, build your own “brag sheet” that highlights your biggest accomplishments throughout your school career. Hand this to your recommender so they can compose a recommendation that paints an accurate, impressive picture of you.

- **Be concise.**

Think short, sweet and to the point; a reviewer's time is precious. If the word limit is 500–750 words, as it is for *Beat the Odds*, respect that. Don't use unnecessary words, like “that” and “those.” Also avoid extra ‘being’ verbs and too many descriptive phrases. Use essential language.

- **Write, read, rest, repeat.**

Step 1: See the question and do an initial brain dump. Step 2: Re-read it once and do some minor editing. Step 3: Let it rest. Walk away for hours or days to do a mental reset. Step 4: Start over from the top!

Note: If you have questions, be brave and reach out to the organization. Even though it may be intimidating, it is far better to get some clarification and submit an application that meets exact specifications than to hand in something that gets thrown out on a technicality. Remember, these foundations are on your side and want to help you be successful, so use us as a resource!

Children's Defense Fund Texas Beat the Odds® Scholarship Program

Honoring Five Extraordinary Young People

The Children's Defense Fund Texas *Beat the Odds* Scholarship Program honors five outstanding high-school seniors who have overcome major adversity in the lives, achieved academic excellence and given back to their communities through service and leadership. This award includes:

- \$5,000 towards university, college, vocational or trade school
- Laptop computer
- Round-trip ticket on United Airlines
- Professional attire from Macy's
- Ongoing mentorship, support, guidance and internship opportunities through the expansive CDF network
- And more!

Visit cdf-texas.org/programs/beat-the-odds to view eligibility requirements and access the application.

Questions? Contact Youth Programs Coordinator Clarissa Webb: cwebb@childrensdefense.org

Application deadline is **TBD**.

