A. **Getting Ready**

1. **Start gathering material about yourself.** Build a file and/or a resume. Things to include:
   a. Transcript/Grade Report (know areas of emphasis)
   b. Test scores SAT or ACT (these tests should be taken no later than December of your senior year)
   c. Activities Chart detailing information about school and community services, honors and award, hobbies and interests, work and volunteer experience. *(refer to pages 37-39)*

2. **Start thinking about your personal goals.** You may be asked to write essays on these types of topics:
   a. What are your education and career goals?
   b. Where do you see yourself five years from now?
   c. How will this scholarship help you complete your education?

3. **Contact several individuals for letters of recommendations to act as references.** Scholarship applications may ask for academic and/or community (someone who knows you outside of school) recommendations. Check to see if they would be willing to write a letter of reference for you. Ask them early – a couple of weeks, at least – so they will not be rushed and so that you will have the letters in time for the application deadline. **Tip:** create a resume or bio about yourself to provide to references along with activities chart that will aide them in writing your letter; Teacher’s/Counselor’s work with many students, so it will also serve as a reminder as to who you are.

B. **The Application Process – Start early**

1. Most scholarship applications require an application form, a personal essay (usually 150-500 words), and letters of recommendation. Allow yourself at least 4-6 weeks to complete the application.

2. Finish the application form **COMPLETELY** and answer every question. If you skip a question, you may be disqualified.

3. Be aware of the **DEADLINE.** A late or incomplete application may automatically disqualify you.

C. **The Essay – Before you start writing**

1. You are writing for a purpose. Be persuasive in showing the reader that you are deserving of the award. Remember your audience.

2. Make certain that you understand the question or the topic. Your essay should answer the question or speak directly to the given topic.
   a. **Start with a rough draft** or outline; list all of your ideas, any possibilities. Be creative; brainstorm without censoring.
   b. **Highlight your “best stuff.”** Sort through these ideas and prioritize. You can’t tell the committee everything, be selective.
   c. **Do not repeat information that might be addressed somewhere else.** Choose information and ideas which are not reflected in other parts of your application. This is your chance to supplement your application with information that you want the committee to know.
   d. **Make sure you are portraying yourself as true as possible.** Remember, many times this is the only place to show the reader who you are, as many scholarship committees don’t interview candidates. **Tip:** Your essay is also a very effective place to address deficiencies in your academic history. Don’t assume they won’t see it; they WILL. It’s better to address it up front!

D. **The Essay – Writing the draft – BE SURE TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS!**

1. Don’t expect your first draft to be perfect, but do **REMEMBER THE RULES TO EFFECTIVE WRITING!** Allow enough time to evaluate and rewrite. It is a good idea to compose your
How to Apply for Scholarships (cont.)

essay on a separate sheet of paper and transfer the final draft to the scholarship application. **Tip:** *If you find it difficult to write about yourself,* try the following: ask 2-3 people, whose opinion you respect and who you trust to objectively evaluate you, to write a letter about you. Then use their voice to talk about yourself.

2. Develop paragraphs one idea at a time. Include a topic sentence with examples of your point.
3. Make clear transitions between paragraphs.
4. Select action verbs and avoid the passive voice.
5. **Use concrete examples.** Often examples of behavior demonstrate an idea more effectively than an adjective. (Show how or why, don’t just tell.) It adds more emphasis for example, to describe your family having to live day by day on food stamps and wondering where you were going to lay your head down for the night than to simply say, “I’m low income & homeless.”
6. Develop exact, concrete language. Avoid vague references, wordiness, or clichés.

E. The Essay – Editing

1. Consider the following points:
   a. Does your introduction capture the reader’s attention?
   b. Are you consistent in you verb tense?
   c. Are you clear and coherent?
   d. Are you concise enough to adhere to the limits in essay length?
   e. Have you checked for grammatical and spelling errors?
   f. Does the essay present you as you wish to be seen?
   g. Would you remember your essay if you had to read 200 others?
   h. Does your closing paragraph present you as you wish to be remembered?

   **Tip:** *Read your essay out loud to yourself to check for any inconsistencies. If you stumble over a word/paragraph there may be something else going on.*

2. **Have essay proofread!** Ask a person or several whose writing abilities you respect to review your draft. Sometimes a fresh pair of eyes will spot errors that tired ones miss.

F. Completing Your Application

1. Should you type it? Some applications list a preference for typed or handwritten work. Regardless of the preference, the application should be neat and legible.
2. When you think that the application is complete, ask a friend to review it one last time. Make certain you provide everything that the application requires.
3. **Retain a copy for your records.** You’ve worked hard and you never know what can happen; it may get lost in the mail, or overlooked when processed. It’s always a good idea to have a backup copy!

   **Tip:** *Even if you don’t receive the scholarship, it doesn’t always mean you weren’t “good enough.”* Most scholarships are very competitive and renewable which means you can always try again! Keeping a copy saves your hard work to re-evaluate and re-submit the following year!

G. Follow-Up

1. Thank those who assisted you with the application or wrote letters of recommendation. A thank-you note is always appreciated.
2. If you are granted a scholarship, be certain to keep in touch with the donors. It is especially crucial to maintain contact if the scholarship is renewable.
3. If you are granted a renewable scholarship, find out if you must meet specific conditions to have your award renewed.