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»» A FREE TOOLKIT

Detailed Scholarship Application *Checkpoints.*

Three mistakes sink strong profiles. These are the exact checks that prevent them: tick every box before you submit.

SOP

Reference letters

Tailoring

Pre-submit check

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Why strong applicants still get rejected

Good grades and a strong IELTS score get you into the pile. Three avoidable mistakes decide what happens next.

1

An SOP that sounds like every other SOP

Committees have read “I always dreamt of this” many times. Ambition alone is not a reason to invest in you.

2

A generic reference letter

“Hardworking and sincere” describes almost every applicant. A letter works when it contains specific examples.

3

One application sent everywhere

Same SOP, same CV, same letter, only the name changed. Every scholarship looks for something different in you.

How to use this toolkit. Work through Parts 1 to 3 for each scholarship, then finish with the Part 4 checklist. A tick means you have actually done it, not that you intend to. **This PDF is fillable:** click the boxes to tick them and type your answers and reflections straight into the worksheets (use Adobe Acrobat/Reader, Chrome, Edge or Preview on a computer, or print it and write by hand). Nobody can guarantee an outcome, however hard you work. But a structured application removes the avoidable reasons for rejection.

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Your motivation statement (SOP)

The SOP (Statement of Purpose, also called a motivation letter) is one of the most important attachments in your application. Make it unmistakably yours.

1.1 Answer the three questions first ☐

Before writing a paragraph, answer these in 2 to 3 sentences each (worksheet on the next page):

THE 3 QUESTIONS 1) Why this degree, and how has your background prepared you? 2) What have you done in this field, and what knowledge gap does the degree fill? 3) How will you contribute to the industry afterwards?

1.2 Show the gap in your knowledge ☐

Name what you have already done in this field, and the specific knowledge you realised you still need. Then name 2 to 3 modules of this degree that provide it. People completely miss this link.

1.3 Explain how you will contribute ☐

Say how you plan to contribute to this industry after the degree: which problem, which sector, which people benefit. A committee that invests financially needs to see what it gets in return.

1.4 Replace the template opening ☐

Delete any opening line a stranger could paste into their own SOP, such as "I always dreamt of this". Start with a specific moment, project or problem that is only yours.

1.5 Back every claim with evidence ☐

Each strong adjective ("passionate", "leader", "hardworking") needs one concrete example next to it: what you did, when, and what happened.

1.6 Do the "anyone could write this" test ☐

Read each paragraph and ask: could another applicant use this unchanged? If yes, rewrite it with details from your own life.

1.7 Check word limit, format and file type ☐

Match the scholarship's exact word limit, file format and naming rules. Read it aloud once to catch awkward sentences.

1.8 Get one honest reader ☐

Ask someone who has seen a successful scholarship application (a senior, mentor or counsellor) to read it. Friends and family tend to say "it's good".

Draft your three answers, then build the SOP

Q1 Why this degree? How has your background prepared you?

Q2 What have you done in this field, and what knowledge gap does this degree fill?

Q3 How will you contribute to this industry after the degree?

A STRUCTURE THAT WORKS

- 1** A **specific moment** that shows why you care (not a template opening)
- 2** Your **background** and what it has prepared you for, with evidence
- 3** The **knowledge gap** and the modules that close it
- 4** Your **contribution** after the degree: sector, problem, people
- 5** Why this **scholarship**: connect your plan to its mission

Reference letters that work

A recommender will usually say yes, but a last-minute request produces a generic letter. Give them time and details.

21 days beforeAsk your
recommender**14 days before**

Send the details pack

7 days before

Friendly reminder

3 days beforeConfirm it was
submitted**2.1 Ask 2 to 3 weeks before the deadline**☐

Not 4 days. Professors are busy and rarely remember individual contributions, so give them time to write something specific.

2.2 Choose people who know your work☐

Pick the recommender who can describe what you actually did, not just the one with the most impressive title.

2.3 Send a short “details pack”☐

What you did in their class, a project you worked on, and a moment they may remember. Details, not a finished letter (do not dictate it).

2.4 Tell them what the scholarship is about☐

Share the scholarship's mission and criteria, so they can add personalised details instead of a generic paragraph.

2.5 Give them the logistics☐

Deadline, how the letter is submitted (portal link or email), the exact form or format, and your updated CV or draft SOP.

2.6 Remind politely, then confirm☐

One friendly reminder a week before. After the deadline, check the portal shows the letter as received.

2.7 Say thank you☐

A short note afterwards. You may need this person again for the next application.

The details pack and the request email

A Your details pack (fill in, 5 minutes)

In your class I...

The project I worked on with you...

A moment you may remember...

What this scholarship is looking for...

Deadline and how to submit...

REQUEST EMAIL (COPY AND ADAPT)

Subject: Request for a reference letter: [Scholarship name], deadline [date]

Dear Professor [Surname],

I am applying for [scholarship] at [university/country] and would be grateful if you could write a reference letter for me. The deadline is [date], and the letter is submitted [portal/email details].

To make this easier, I have attached a short summary of my work in your class and on [project], my CV, and a note on what this scholarship looks for. Please feel free to add anything you remember that you think is relevant.

Thank you for your time and support.

Kind regards,

[Your name]

Tailor every application

Each scholarship asks different questions and looks for a distinct quality in you. For example, one may place weight on leadership, another on your contribution to your own country after the degree. Always check the current official criteria.

3.1 Read every prompt carefully

☐

You can often imply the mission of the scholarship from its prompts. Answer exactly what is asked.

3.2 Research the scholarship

☐

Why it was created, who created it, what the foundation does, the background of people who won it, and what they do after their degree.

3.3 Write the mission in your own words

☐

Copy the mission statement, then underline the 3 to 5 words that matter most. Your application must visibly connect to them.

3.4 Choose your examples for this scholarship

☐

From your own life, pick the stories that make you a desirable candidate for this specific scholarship, not just a good student.

3.5 Write a separate SOP for each one

☐

Reuse facts, not paragraphs. Reordering your CV to lead with the achievements this scholarship values is a quick win.

3.6 Run the name-swap check

☐

Search every document for the previous scholarship's or university's name. A leftover name is one of the fastest ways to look careless.

3.7 Confirm the alignment before you submit

☐

If your application does not show how you align with the scholarship's mission, even a strong profile can be passed over. Re-read the mission, then your SOP.

Alignment sheet (one per scholarship)

Scholarship	
Deadline and portal	
Who created it, and why	
Mission, in their words	
3 to 5 key words in the mission	
Who has won it before	
What winners do afterwards	

MATCH EACH PROMPT TO YOUR OWN STORY

Prompt or question	My example (specific: what, when, result)

REFLECT

Where does my story clearly match this scholarship's mission, and where is the gap I still need to close?

Final pre-submit checklist

Do not submit until every box is ticked.

CONTENT

- ☐ I answered every prompt, in the right order
- ☐ My SOP is written for this scholarship only
- ☐ SOP opening is specific to me, not a template
- ☐ SOP covers: why this degree, knowledge gap, contribution
- ☐ Every strong claim has a concrete example
- ☐ My CV leads with what this scholarship values
- ☐ No previous scholarship or university name left behind
- ☐ Someone experienced has read the final draft

REFERENCES

- ☐ Recommenders asked 2 to 3 weeks ahead
- ☐ They received my details pack and the scholarship's criteria
- ☐ The portal shows each letter as received

DOCUMENTS AND FORMAT

- ☐ Transcripts and certificates are ready and legible
- ☐ Language test score meets the requirement
- ☐ Word limits respected
- ☐ File type, size and naming rules followed
- ☐ Passport and ID details match everywhere
- ☐ Documents are in the required language, translated if needed
- ☐ Every upload opens correctly after upload

SUBMISSION

- ☐ Submitting 3 to 5 days before the deadline
- ☐ I have saved a copy of everything I submitted
- ☐ I have saved the confirmation email or screenshot
- ☐ I know the next date (interview, result, documents)
- ☐ Calendar reminders are set

REFLECT

What is the strongest part of my application, and why?

What is the weakest part, and what will I do about it this week?

Who will review it before I submit, and by when?

»» WHAT NEXT

Want a second pair of expert eyes on your application?

Our team reviews applications and guides students personally. Book a free consultation and we will go through your SOP, references and shortlist with you.

Book a free consultation at aptcon.co

Also free: the Scholarship Roadmap, the full scholarship process as one plan, and more toolkits at aptcon.co/resources.html

This toolkit is general guidance, not legal or immigration advice, and it does not guarantee any outcome. Scholarship rules change; always confirm requirements on the official website before you apply.