

Practical Advice for Writing a KEF Scholarship Essay

Preface:

One of our graduate students created this document to help students write a strong essay for the KEF general scholarship application. After all, the essay is the most important piece of the application! It is where you can highlight the most important aspects of your merit and convey to the Scholarship Review Committee exactly what you want them to know about yourself.

Before You Begin Writing:

Make sure you read the entire scholarship posting. It can be easy to fall into the trap of assuming you know what the Scholarship Committee is looking for in an application, but the answers you need are in the scholarship posting. For all KEF Scholarships, you will need to fulfill the basic requirements, which may vary between scholarships. When you read the posting, make sure you are eligible and have all the pieces of the application that you will need.

KEF Prompt Specific Advice:

There are multiple sections in the KEF essay prompts, and it's important that you respond to each part. Each different KEF scholarship also has different prompts, so ensure you look carefully at each one. Pay particular attention if you are a returning student (additional prompt required) or a Step-Up student, which have additional prompts to answer.

With respect to the brief personal and family history, you should introduce yourself, explain why you are applying to this scholarship, and describe your ties to Alutiiq culture (who in your family is a descendant, which tribe you are affiliated with, and a little bit about how that relates to who you are as an individual). While this is important, the prompt does specify that they are looking for a *brief* personal and family history. You should tell enough to let the readers know who you are, but not so much that they know your entire life's story. Remember, you have a maximum of two pages to respond to all pieces of the prompt!

It is okay to combine the next few sections, including life and educational goals, community and/or family involvement, and volunteer activities/awards, if you feel that fits your personal writing style and your narrative's organization best (i.e., keeping events chronological, grouping your points by theme, or sticking to one paragraph per section of the prompt). Just remember to discuss something that you've done for each section, even if you group the sections together to fit a different organizational approach.

You can continue to sprinkle in aspects of your personal history throughout the whole essay, especially if it relates to your goals, outreach, or successes. For example, if you have a fundamental childhood memory that took you down your current path, you can start off your next paragraph with a short anecdote (with a sentence or two) about your inspiration.

Also, if you faced significant adversity, it is okay to bring up the obstacles you faced, but it is more important to explain how you overcame those obstacles (or describe your steps in a plan to overcome them). If the challenges you faced were formative in your decision to do something like volunteer or study an issue, explain that as well! Keep in mind that KEF Scholarships are merit-based scholarships, which means those with the highest GPA's and application scores will receive the most funding. With this in mind, focus mainly on your achievements, and how they will lead to accomplishing your educational and career goals in the future.

For Step-Up students, the advice is similar, if your GPA is not as high as you would like it to be due to adversity, you can definitely address what went wrong or what obstacles stood in your path, but it is more important to show that you have a plan to improve your GPA and show that you are looking ahead for ways to set yourself up for success.

Tips for Overcoming Writer's Block:

If you feel like you have no idea what to include in your essay, start by making a checklist of key points you need to touch on from the essay prompts in the scholarship posting. Then, write a few bullet points for each section of the essay.

Alternatively, if you have too many ideas to include, try writing a list of all your ideas, and then group them together. This way, you can identify what pieces of your story go well together and would form a cohesive narrative.

If you feel like you know what you want to include in your essay but are struggling to put words down on the page, I find it helpful to have one document that you plan on having your "final" essay in and then opening another document that is "just for draft space." Most of the time, I end up writing my final essay in my draft document, but it can be helpful to have a separate place for "imperfect" writing. It also may help to try writing your ideas out by hand before turning them into digital text.

If you are finding your writing feels clunky, but you can't figure out why, once you have a solid draft of your essay, try reading it out loud, or having a friend read it out loud to you. You will have an easier time hearing what sentences people will stumble over.

Similarly, if you are someone who can explain what you're trying to convey better when you're speaking, try using the dictation feature! Many phones and even laptops have a voice-to-text feature, and both Google Docs and Microsoft Word even have it built into the programs.