

# Handbook on Applying to Opportunities

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## About

There are tons of opportunities out there for college students to pursue. Scholarships, Internships, Volunteering positions, Competitions and Mentorship programs, only to name a few.

### ***But why should you care?***

Opportunities such as these help students build skills, acquire real world experience and add in credibility to their profiles while still in college. The world out there is competitive and everyone's looking for what's unique about you. Today more than ever, there is a need for you to be well-equipped with professionalism and 21st century skills.

Having some of these prestigious opportunities under you belt will go a long way in adding that touch of uniqueness to your story and will speak volumes for you. Some of these opportunities also translate into job opportunities. In 2017, 3 girls from Kerala secured jobs at Microsoft as a part of the Grace Hopper Student Scholarship.

Having said that, the pursuit towards achieving these opportunities is a learning journey in itself. Many recipients say that the journey was truly life changing and that it brought out more clarity about them and about their own goals. They say that instilled a new wave of confidence in them and they were all set to take over the world as they graduated.

College is a time when you have an abundance of a resource: Time. Where you invest your time upon will determine what you'll go on to do upon graduation. Most of us are unaware of what it is that we'd like to pursue. Trying out couple of these opportunities and living the fresh experiences that these bring in can really help us understand a bit more about what it is that we wish to do.

Finally, these opportunities are fun! Securing scholarships will ensure that you have the financial freedom to pursue your goals while in college. 8 girls from Kerala in 2017 received 2000\$ to support their education as a part of the WeTech Qualcomm Global Scholarship.

Getting yourself a ticket to a fully funded conference gets you free travel to a new state or even a new country! Felix Josemon, one of the 6 winners of the Google Venkat Panchapakesan Memorial Scholarship received the opportunity to travel to Silicon Valley on a full sponsorship from Google.

You meet new people - some much similar to you, some much different from you. The kind of exposure that this provides you with while still in college will help you step out of your little world and have a taste of what it is going to be like.

And finally your box of experiences is what you'll cherish the most when it's all done.

So yes, you must care and you must try. For a fun, meaningful learning experience awaits you.

It is indeed true that an opportunity does not knock on your door twice. So let's get started today!

## How to use this handbook?

So this handbook is an extensive note on applying to opportunities. It covers the approach you must take when applying, includes best practices and also general guidance on some essential skills you should look to build.

Trying to read this handbook just like another book might be a bad idea. When getting started, giving the entire handbook a quick scan should help you get familiarised. And as you start preparing to apply for various opportunities, you may refer specific topics for detailed information and insight.

If you are only beginning to apply to such opportunities, you should definitely read through and see if you can complete our 'Getting Started Checklist' to cover the basic necessities to putting in an application.

If you find yourself doubting whether or not you must pursue these, please know that you should. Our section of 'Dealing with your inner demons' addresses few common negative feelings you may have while applying to opportunities.

This handbook contains simple, actionable information that's going to help you put in a winning application to that opportunity you wish to secure.

We hope that you find the handbook useful. As you get started on this amazing journey, do understand that you have our best wishes with you!

## Where to find opportunities?

These days, you can find opportunities everywhere. From the newspaper, from your peers and also from the internet. Most education supplements with newspapers have a section on opportunities.

Aside, you can also search on the internet for various opportunities.

There are some specific websites also that list opportunities and the list below contains some of them:

- [Hey Success](#)

Hey success lists internship, scholarships, competitions and other such opportunities. The only drawback of heysuccess is that it allows you to view names of only 40 opportunities for free.

- [Profellow](#)

Profellow is a site for fellowships. They permit you to access opportunities for free. Fully funded higher education fellowships and opportunities seem to cover the majority of the database.

- [Buddy for Study](#)

Buddy4study is primarily focussed on scholarships. Their portal is free to access and lists a good amount of quality scholarships.

To make things easier, Rethink also has two key means of discovering these opportunities.

- [Rethink Wiki](#)

Rethink wiki is our curated list of opportunities. We don't put in an opportunity in our wiki unless we confirm its validity.

- [Rethink Reddit](#)

Our reddit is an open notice board. People who encounter new opportunities post them on to our reddit board. While this is a great way of discovering new opportunities, do note that these opportunities have not been validated by us.

If you do discover any opportunity, feel free to post them to our Reddit Board. Collectively, we will then be able to ensure that lot more people know about these opportunities.

[Here's how you can post on our Reddit board.](#)

## How to validate opportunities?

There are tons of opportunities available today and not all of them may be great. Some opportunities may be a scam, others may not be deserving of your time and effort. In any case, validating an opportunity and carefully understanding more about it is important before you decide to apply.

### How do you go about this?

One of the key ways to knowing whether an opportunity is good or not is by understanding the organization hosting it. For instance, we all love Baskin Robin ice creams. We know that BR is really good at this. So tomorrow, when BR launches an ice-cream sandwich, chances are that it may be good. And because we trust BR with icecreams, we trust it with the new product too.

Likewise, if the opportunity is being **offered by a reputed organisation**, chances are that it will be a good one. Along with this, you should also be looking to understand more about the people behind the opportunity. Who are the founders of this? Why are they doing this? What is their vision? Answers to these again will help you assess an opportunity.

While at it, it may also be good to checkout **how old the opportunity is**. This helps you get an idea of what to expect. Typically, the first few cohorts of most opportunities may be open ended and slightly confusing even because everyone is new to it. But if it has been around for quite some time, then the process and systems would have been laid out well.

If the opportunity has been here for quite some time, then how was it all this while? What was the experience of previous participants like? Who do they recommend this opportunity for? Find answers to these questions too.

Checking out the news on whether there is any **news about the opportunity** might also be a good validation point. If there's no news about a particular opportunity, then you should at least try and find information about the organisation hosting it and also the specific people behind it.

Finally, **take references**. Understanding what the experiences of previous beneficiaries of the opportunity were like, whether or not they'd recommend the opportunity and also who they think the opportunity would be apt for would be helpful in knowing what to expect.

Having said that, we might never be able to truly assess an opportunity. Sometimes, we will know if it was good or bad only once we go through the whole experience. Holding our end of the bargain and doing our research can to a great extent help us stay away from traps and timewasters. But there may be exceptions!

How do you find all this information? for starters, begin looking at the official website of the opportunity and check the 'About Us' or 'Vision' pages. These pages typically detail about the



program and the organisers. Then from there, go on to read more about the organisation and team behind it.

You can also use google extensively in this regard. We've detailed how to do this in the upcoming section on 'Research'. Do read that up!

## Dealing with your inner Demons

The process of applying to opportunities can be extremely rewarding. It is usually a time when you think and reflect deeper about yourself and take one step closer to your goals.

But at the same time, the process might be gruelling and hard to stick through. You may feel insecure and uncertain about most things. What's hard is sticking through the process and doing what you are supposed to, despite all these feelings.

Before you begin to even familiarise with the guidance, let's address the elephant in the room. Let us first look at some common challenges and insecurities one may face and how you can navigate through them. It is not certain that you will feel any of these but should you feel so, do understand that this is perfectly normal. Almost everyone goes through these challenges. But only the ones that come out of these will finally make it.

If you do not feel any of these insecurities, then great! congrats. You're all set to begin. So jump to next chapter on approaching the applications and get started!

If you do feel worried, nervous? worked up? Stay patient and read through :)

### Common Challenges

#### **I'm not good enough!**

Almost everyone does this mistake of trying to evaluate and grade yourself based on what you *think* is good enough. Maybe you found out that your share of experiences and accomplishments are different from those of a previous winner. Maybe you are comparing yourself with another student who is applying to the opportunity. Or maybe you are reading through the selection criteria and feeling, "I don't have any of these!"

Truth is that there is no need to feel so. Comparing yourself with anything or any one can be detrimental to your own growth. If you do feel that you are not good enough, then you should translate them to this: "I can do better than what I have done so far and I need to invest in my own growth". Applying to this opportunity without judging yourself is you taking prompt action and investing in your growth.

#### **I'm confused about my goals**

While starting out with identifying our goals, everyone goes through this phase. We are all humans and it is quite natural to feel this way. What you want today might not be what you want tomorrow. As you evolve, your goals will also evolve.

But if you feel super confused while you apply, you should take a time out and rethink about them. Try and refocus your goals on to the frame of the opportunity and see if you can zero in on a goal at least for the purpose of filling up your application.

### **Will I get selected?**

Honestly, no one knows the answer to this unless you do get selected or rejected. Worrying about this question is merely a waste of your own time and energy. Neither will you be able to find an answer to this, nor will you be able to focus your mind onto applying.

Remember that every second you worry about this, you are actually snatching away time from doing what you are really supposed to do in improving your chances of getting selected. you are much better off being calm and working on your application.

### **My parents wont anyway allow me to pursue the opportunity. Then why apply?!**

The answer to this one is simple: Your parents might change their mind.

We have often seen a lot of cases where parents were initially reluctant about allowing their daughter or son to go attend a program but eased up once the student actually got selected.

Pheba, a 2017 GHCI scholar, in her interview with us, shares this experience of hers where her parents did not initially let her travel to Bangalore to attend the GHCI conference. But she finally managed to help them understand the importance of the conference, the career fair that happens there and also how those opportunities could change her life. Her parents finally did permit her to attend the conference and true to Pheba's words, the career fair at GHCI did change her life. She got placed at Microsoft as a Project Manager.

If you feel that your parents might not understand you and quit the very same moment without even trying, then your chances of availing the opportunity are nil. Instead of getting to these conclusions by yourself, what might be better is giving it a try. You never know what's going to happen!

### **My language is bad**

Not to worry about this one. Lot of students find language to be an issue primarily because they think that writing and speaking in flowery language is integral to a winning application. But this is actually not true. The reviewers of an opportunity evaluate you on the basis of who you are and what you have done. Your essays are not entering an essay writing competition. So beautiful language, while may be an advantage is definitely not a determining factor.

What matters more is that you write from your heart, with honesty and authenticity. Be true to yourself and to your application and the reviewers will definitely understand what it is that you are trying to convey.

If you do feel insecure about your language you can try using a spell and grammar check tool to find common mistakes and correct them. One such tool is Grammarly. It works really well in highlighting common errors in your writing and also provides you suggestions to improve it.

What you can also do is run your application past a good friend or someone who is proficient enough with language. Getting someone to proofread and help you edit it out along with helping you understand where you went wrong and how you could correct it is a good idea.

**I don't have enough accomplishments to write about.**

This one is a bit tricky. Why because sometimes, you may genuinely not have much to write about. And this is when you know for sure that you haven't participated in enough activities. Or maybe the activities you did take part in don't fit in with the opportunity.

The other case is where you only *feel* that you don't have enough accomplishments. This is a translation of the "I'm not good enough" issue that most applicants face.

If you really do feel that you genuinely do not have enough accomplishments to showcase about, then honestly, it is a clear message to yourself on what you must be improving upon. Take it in the right spirit instead of feeling bad about it. What's important is that you decide to put in an application even though you feel so. Because we really don't know what will click.

There isn't a magic formula such as 3 projects, 2 volunteering experience and one good internship for you to get selected. So we don't know for sure about where your accomplishments really stand. How you fare in the selection depends not just on you but also on your competitors. Let's take the benefit of the doubt and choose to be on the brighter side here. Decide to apply this time and see for yourself what happens.

And when you are done applying, you can take up these issues you face and see how you can improve upon your accomplishments so that you increase your chances of getting selected at least the next year, if not this one.

**This is just way too hard. I'll try next time.**

To put it bluntly, if this is what you think, you're being lazy. And no lazy person ever made it to the top. It takes effort for you to really do things in life and only those who go through the process and the hardships that come with it finally make it to the finish line.

Take out some time and effort to try doing this. You will thank yourself at the end of it.

**I have back papers.**

This may not really be an issue in case of all opportunities. In cases where an opportunity specifies academic achievements or potential as one of their key selection criteria, this may

matter. But in other cases where the opportunity evaluates you based on your skills and not your marks, your back papers might not matter.

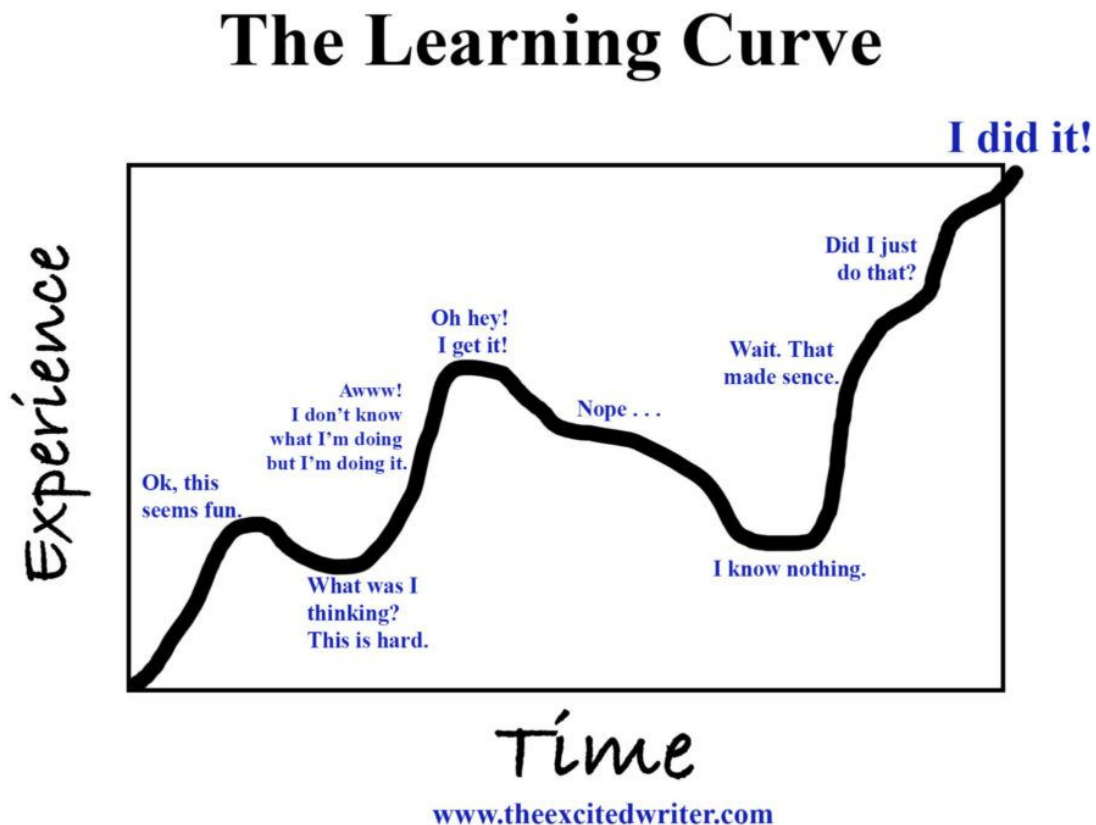
In case the selection criteria is ambiguous and you do not know if you stand a chance to get through, then it really means that you may still have a window of chance to get selected. Ensure that you apply despite your reservations and see for yourself if it worked!

### It will be a rollercoaster ride

Your application process is essentially a learning process and every learning cycle is not a smooth road. It is in all probability going to be a rollercoaster ride.

It is good for you to prepare yourself to face the ride ahead of time instead of fighting it as you encounter it.

See the image below? That's probably what you might feel and go through for the first few times you begin applying. Eventually, with time and experience, you will get better at it and will be able to quickly complete application processes.



If you really think about it, every time you have tried to learn or do something new, you have gone through a series of ups and downs. And probably the only reason why you were able to finally manage to pull through and complete it was because you disciplined yourself.

You dealt with the difficult phases and kept doing what you were supposed to do. And that is probably what will help you get ahead through your application process too.

There might be times when you feel you aren't good enough. But keep at it. Keep trying. Your effort will finally bring forth results.

While at it, do take care not to be too hard on yourself. While facing challenges, it is important for you to remain optimistic and determined to solve them. Instead, if you begin to believe that you may not be able to do it, then finally you may really not be able to do it.

Everyone has a different way of dealing with their issues. One of the things you may do at the beginning of the process is write down why you really want to apply for the opportunity. When things get difficult and you feel like quitting, it is good to go back and remind yourself about why you wanted to apply in the first place. Surrounding yourself with your well wishers and a positive support system is also essential.

Finally, always remember that if you decide to quit and not put in an application, your chances of getting selected is zero. Precisely, zero. But putting in an application, you have some chance at actually getting selected to the opportunity. It is good committing to applying no matter what, even if you feel it is a bad application or that you wouldn't get selected.

For in most cases, there is no cost for putting in an application. You have nothing to lose but have everything to gain.

## Dealing with Rejection

You very enthusiastically applied to an opportunity and perhaps got rejected? Let's be honest, it hurts. Instead of ignoring how we feel about this and denying it, let's look to acknowledge it. Let's accept that some things might not have worked the way we wanted it to and that we need to try harder and smarter next time.

You might feel all sorts of negativity at the moment. But hey, rejection might not be so bad either. How come?

For one, the mere fact that you got rejected means that you pushed your limits. If it really was super easy for you to get selected, then it would mean that you were still playing around in your comfort zone. Instead, you tried to achieve for a higher target and means that you are genuinely trying to improve your capabilities.

Secondly, this may be a brilliant opportunity for you to really assess your abilities and understand what more you should learn and improve upon to get selected. If not for such an opportunity, you might not have even considered this.

Rejection is entirely an opportunity to learn and grow. Do not let yourself talk negative - that you did not deserve it, or that you are not good enough. For all you know, maybe you made it to the waiting list. Maybe you were selected but you had to be dropped due to restrictions on number of students who could be selected. So it's not yet time for you to conclude that you cannot do this.

It's time for you to pick yourself up and keep trying better no matter what. For this rejection really does not define who you are. You are stronger than this :)

I quite recently came across this challenge called as **#100RejectionLetters**. What this essentially means is that you make it a mission of your lives to receive 100 rejection letters. This sure is a fun way to look at Rejection and also even enjoy it a bit. So here, I dare you. Are you up for the #100RejectionLetter challenge?

# Approaching the Application

This section will cover all about how you should be approaching your opportunity application.

We will look at understanding how you must approach the application form first. Then we will get to how you can answer few common application segments and also look at commonly asked questions.

## Generic Application Approach

Let's say you already have an opportunity in mind that you want to apply to. The following topics will look at how you must approach the application form for the specific opportunity.

This is how we'll proceed:

### 1. Research

Research helps you understand the opportunity and the organisation hosting the opportunity better. It in turn helps you put in an application that connects better with what is expected by the selection committee.

### 2. Familiarise with the Application Process

The application process begins with you familiarising about the application process and requirements.

### 3. Prepare your application

Post familiarisation, you move into preparing your application.

#### a. Laying down the groundwork

You begin by creating a copy of the application, checklist and having all the basic documents ready.

#### b. Thinking through what to write

You then have to think through how you will be positioning yourself in your application.

#### c. Writing your Shitty First Draft

You start writing up your application by writing a shitty first draft. This draft helps you get all the content in your head, out into paper.

#### d. Reviewing your application

You move on to then creating subsequent versions of your application by refining it with feedback from review.

### 4. Best Practices

We shall also look at some of the best practices and tips to help you put in a successful application.



## Research

Every opportunity application you begin should really begin from Research. You first need to understand the opportunity and the organisation offering this opportunity inside out.

### Why?

Understanding why a particular organisation is offering a particular opportunity will give you a sense of the organisation's core values and expectations. This will help you connect your values with theirs, in turn matching expectations.

Understanding all elements of an opportunity upfront is critical. What is the eligibility? What is the timeline like? What are the application requirements?

A slightly more important question you might want to focus on is 'What will I really get out of this opportunity?'. Both tangible and intangible benefits you might potentially get are important here.

Tangible outcomes being Certificates, Recognition, Financial Aid.

And Intangible outcomes being Network, Access to Leaders, Mentorship, Skill development avenues and so on.

Having a clear understanding of all the potential outcomes of the opportunity and in turn understanding which outcomes of these you really wish to accomplish is key in putting in an honest, authentic application.

So given this premise, your research should be around the following areas:

1. About the opportunity
2. About the organisation
3. About the previous winners and their experience

Let's delve a bit deeper into the questions you will need to find answers to at the end of your research.

- 1. Researching about the opportunity**
  - a. What is the opportunity? (Try summarising this in a sentence)
  - b. What is the eligibility criteria?
  - c. What is the timeline like?
  - d. What is the application process?
  - e. Is the opportunity genuine and NOT a scam?

**2. Researching about the organisation**

- a. What does the organisation do?
- b. What are the organisation's core values?
- c. Why are they offering this opportunity?
- d. Who are they looking for?
- e. Is there a chance of potential employment through this opportunity?
- f. Is the organisation genuine and NOT a scam?

**3. Researching about previous winners and their experiences**

- a. Who are the previous winners?
- b. What have they achieved?
- c. How do their experiences fit in with the selection criteria?
- d. How was their program experience?
- e. What did they learn the most?
- f. Do they recommend the program?

Do look at these questions only as a starting point of your exploration. Feel free to go above and beyond these to understand the program better.

## Where to find all this information?

Information is at the heart of research. And finding legit sources of information is crucial. As you begin your research, you have three key information sources to help you understand better about the opportunity, the organisation and the experience previous winners have had.

1. Google
2. The News
3. Previous Winners

When it comes to finding information about someone or something, there is one platform that really can be your best friend and that is Google.

**Google is your Best Friend!**

This is the 21st century and you have almost all information up on the internet. The time of pen and paper application is expiring quickly. The world is moving on to the internet and google is really your go-to platform to find all this information.

Learn to google and find information. Trust me, you will thank yourself.

## How do you really google?

For starters, just type in the name of the opportunity and click search. The most relevant search results will come up on top. Read through some of these.

Let's say *Venkat Panchapakesan Scholarship*

Now try typing name of the organisation offering the scholarship and hit search.

In this case, it is google. So we got to google for *Google*.

And now try typing in **<Name of the opportunity> + Previous Winners**. Most websites would have published a list of previous winners.

*For instance: Venkat Panchapakesan Scholarship Previous Winners*

In most cases, previous winners of these opportunities would have included the opportunity in their LinkedIn profiles. Under the Awards and Honours section.

So if the organisation has not published the list of winners, you can find out who these winners were by googling for **<Name of the opportunity> + LinkedIn**. In most cases, at least few results will come up.

*Try this for example: Venkat Panchapakesan Scholar LinkedIn.*

See? It is not so hard! Do give it a try!

You should now google to find out answers about the opportunity and the organisation. Ensure that you go through the official website for the opportunity and also the organisation.

While at it, you may also want to checkout if any information about the opportunity is available on YouTube. Video content is sure receiving a lot of attention these days and sometimes you might even find vlogs or experiences shared by previous recipients as well as videos by the host organisation itself.

## Coming next, is News sources.

What does the media really have to say about the opportunity and even the organisation offering it?

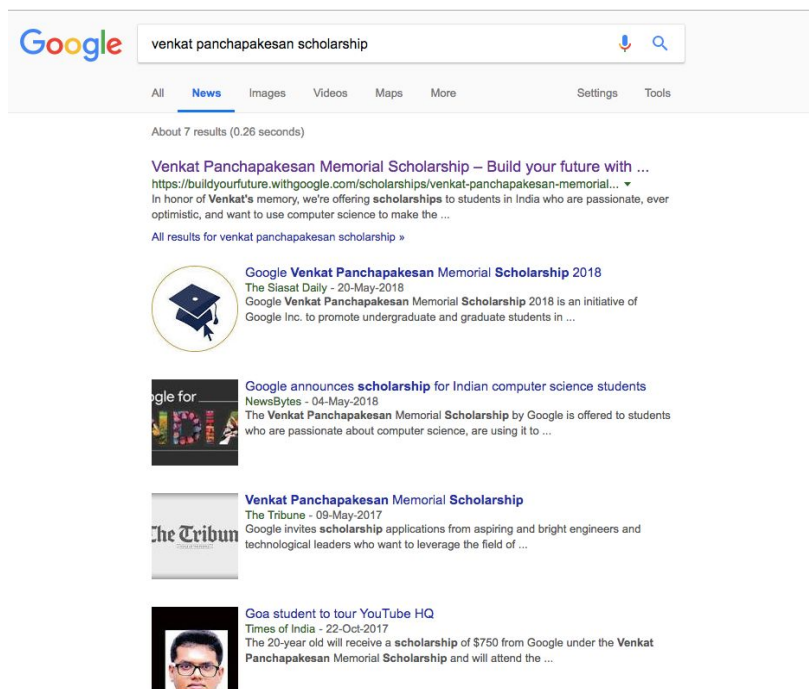
Reading up a bit about any information on the media would be a good way of assessing where the opportunity stands. In some cases, the news may also help you understand genuinity of the opportunity and the organisation - to understand whether either of these is a scam or not even.

Finding negative remarks about the program/organisation can be seen as a red flag. This means that you should really really reconsider associating yourself with the opportunity.

If you do not find any information about the opportunity/organisation at all, then that may either mean that the opportunity is too young to be on media or that there's something fishy going on. We may not be able to clearly determine which of these is true so let's look at this as a yellow flag - meaning it might be good or bad, we aren't deciding just yet.

Any positive information about the opportunity on the media is great. It sure sends a green signal in terms of validating whether the opportunity is NOT a scam.

A simple way to find news about the opportunity or organisation is to search for it on **Google News**. Here is an example of searching for the Venkat Panchapakesan Scholarship. Lots of media results on this one. So it clearly is a green signal.



**Final touch for you to add would be to speak with previous winners.**

Talking to people who have been there, done that will give you a lot of context about what you can really expect from the opportunity.

You can locate previous winners by googling, as discussed above.

Few previous winners share their experiences online in the form of blogs, vlogs, interview or even facebook posts. You should look to google and find out if the winners have published any content online and read through as well.

You can do this by finding out the names of few previous winners and then googling for their name. You may also add in name of the scholarship next to their name along with keywords such as: experience, learning, blog, interview and so on.

Let's try an example.

*Pheba Anna Philip is a 2017 GHCI scholar. So to find out information about her experience online, you may search for: Pheba Anna Philip GHCI Experience OR Pheba Anna Philip interview.*

Once you do this, make sure you read through or listen through their experiences and look for answers to the questions we discussed earlier. In this case, this is how it might look:

1. Who is Pheba? What is her background?
2. What has she achieved prior to this scholarship?
3. How does Pheba's experiences and accomplishments fit in with the selection criteria?
4. How was her program experience?
5. What did she learn the most?
6. Does she recommend the program?

As you find more information, do make a note of responses to these questions.

### **Interviews with Previous Winners**

One of the key things that we do at Rethink is host interviews with previous winners. These interviews happen usually as YouTube Live sessions and address most questions that an applicant might have in mind. These can be easily located by googling for "Rethink Youtube <opportunity name> <scholar's name>". Do note to replace <scholar's name> with the name of the scholar and <opportunity name> with name of the opportunity.

In this case, you should be googling for "Rethink Youtube GHCI Pheba".

### **What to do if you cannot find any information about a previous winner online?**

If you cannot find any experiences about a winner online, but know the name of the winner, then you can try and connect with them over email or social media.

Find them on LinkedIn and drop them a message. See if you can get their email address and write in to them.

You may either request them to share their experience by way or an email or what would be even better is you interviewing them. Get on an online video call, speak with them and ask away these questions. And as you do so, it might be even more amazing for you to publish these interviews online. Not only are you making information public, but you are also adding credibility to yourself.

### Case Study

Felix Josemon, a 2018 GEC Thrissur Computer Science graduate, followed this guidance while applying to the Venkat Panchapakesan Scholarship in 2017.

He first found one previous winner of the scholarship, Prince Raju. Got in touch with him and understood about his experiences. Then with help from Prince, he reached out to 5 others from the 2016 cohort and had hangout calls done with all these winners.

Finally, he consolidated all his learning and put in an application for the scholarship. He went on to become one among the 6 students who won the Google Venkat Panchapakesan scholarship in 2017.

Read more here: [E-meeting 6 Venkat Panchapakesan Memorial Scholars: Felix Josemon](#)

### Critically evaluate your discoveries

What is also important that you critically evaluate all this information you get. Especially the information on the experience of previous winners. Why? Because what they share are merely their perspectives and NOT facts about the program. **The information they give is to be understood WITH their background also in mind.**

For instance, Aminath, a 2017 GHCI scholar and a Biomedical Engineering student at TKMIT says that the GHCI conference was a great experience but the career fair wasn't much helpful.

Now if the conclusion you draw from this is that "the career fair is not useful", then it is not entirely true. You should be understanding that "the career fair was not useful to Aminath" along with the fact that "she is a Biomedical Engineering student". All other students pursuing Electronics, Electrical or Computer Science Engineering may have found the career fair to be extremely useful.

So this is where you really must critically evaluate the information you receive and understand it as it is meant to be, without any exaggeration or extrapolation.

Another important point you really should keep in mind is **collecting information from reliable sources**. Before you even being to accept a particular information you get, you should validate

the source that gave this. Ensure that the person or website or source of your information is authentic and knows what they are talking about. There is every possibility that you will find a lot of misleading sources and if you blindly follow them all, then your chances of being misinformed are extremely high.

For instance: Hypothetically, there may be a blog that says a conference is a fad. Now if you encounter something like this, you should first check out the author of the blog. Has he attended this conference himself? If yes, what is his background? What accolades does the author possess to pose a remark like that? Is there a particular reason for him to say so? Are his views biased?

I mean think about this - if someone who has never even gone to a conference tells you that it is good or bad, then what sense does it make? If you feel that the person lacks the authenticity to comment on the opportunity, then feel free to completely dismiss the remark.

## Taking Notes

As you find more information and validate them, it may be good for you to consolidate all your learning into a document or notebook. The primary idea is to have your conclusions written down.

As you write the application form, you will very much need to refer these notes from your research and incorporate elements from it in your application responses as well.

So do note to either bookmark or save the links to relevant information online so that you can go back and refer to it if needed.

## Rethink's Wikipedia of Opportunities

Researching about something and validating it can be a time consuming process. But despite that, it is a high value work and will really do you good.

But to make it easier for you to do this, we have our wiki. We validate all the opportunities we discover and add them in to our wiki. We also have basic information about the opportunity, the organisation listed in the wiki page for the respective opportunity.

In cases where we have been able to locate previous winners and interview them, the information has also been made available.

To find our wiki, you can google for "Rethink Wiki" and I'm sure one of the first links to come up will be ours.

## Familiarise the Application Process

After your research is done, your next step would be to familiarise with the application process. The official opportunity website or even our Rethink wiki could come handy here.

Most opportunities have an application form that you can fill up. There are some cases where you might have to email a document in place of filling up a form.

Now the form may contain few application questions that will help the reviewers understand more about you as a person and also your work. Some common questions we have seen are Essays, particularly Statement of Purpose, Resume, Video Testimonial and Recommendation Letters.

Most opportunities have only a single step process - where you fill an application form and selections happen based on what you have written.

Some opportunities have a verification round at the end of your application submission. The verification might be to obtain proof on your eligibility or merit and confirming that your profile fits in with their selection criteria.

And some opportunities will have a telephonic or skype interview after your application submission. Some have an in-person interview and some opportunities have both a telephonic and in-person interview.

It is critical for you to clearly understand the steps in the process and the requirements at each stage.

At this point, you should also look to internalise the program timeline and details -

- When is the deadline to submit the application?
- Is there a separate deadline for your recommenders to submit their letters of recommendation?
- When can you expect to know the results and when might you possibly have an interview?
- How would you be intimidated if you were to be selected or rejected?

Do ensure that you know the dates and procedure well so you don't miss out on anything.

Do also ensure that you will be able to commit your time to the process and meet its demands if you truly wish to get through the opportunity.



**Why is this important?**

There have been cases where students have been surprised to know that there would be an interview round if they get selected based on their written application.

And there have been cases where students successfully submitted their applications on time but their recommenders missed to submit the letters of recommendation on time, just because the student missed to note the deadline for submission of LoRs and remind their recommenders about it.

Be sure to not overlook the nitty-gritty in the timeline or the application process. Sometimes one such act may completely throw you off the track.

## Beginning your Application

Once you finish up your research and familiarise with the application process, it is time to begin the application.

In this section, we will cover 4 important segments on writing your application.

1. Laying down the groundwork before you begin
2. Thinking through what you will be writing
3. Writing your shitty first draft
4. Reviewing your application

You will first need to finish up some basic prep before you begin to write the responses. As you start writing, you will need to spend some time thinking about yourself, your goals and how this opportunity really fits in your story. This part may be the most difficult or uncertain but it is going to be the most rewarding one too.

As you begin to write, you may feel stuck, lost or confused. You may feel overwhelmed with all that you wish to write in but then somehow not flowing out. In some cases, it could be the opposite too. You may want to write about everything you've done but wouldn't know how to fit it all in.

A part of making progress comes from accepting that you might feel uncomfortable and that whatever you write in your first draft is going to be messy and might even be shitty. This is where you allow yourself to make mistakes and write a shitty first draft of your application, just to get all the content in your head out there.

What you must also realise is that your final application may look nothing like your shitty first draft (SFD). Your SFD is your version 0. Once you wrap this up, you will need to do a series of reviews - you will review yourself, your friends, mentors or recommenders may also review your application.

After each review, you will iterate your application based on the feedback you receive to create version 1, 2, 3.. and finally your final draft.

Further in this segment, we shall delve deeper into each of these, understand why they are necessary and how they can really impact your application.

## Laying down the groundwork before you begin

As you begin to write the application responses, there is some prep you need to do.

### 1. Creating your Copy of the Application Form

One of the first things you should do is create your own copy of the application form.

#### **Why?**

Typing in responses directly into the application portal right away may prove to be your disadvantage in the following ways:

1. The application portal may refresh itself after a fixed time period in some cases and if this happens, all that you typed out will instantly vanish.
2. In the event that you forget to 'Save the application as Draft' or in cases where the form itself does not give you the option to do so, you might lose all that you type in the form.
3. It is hard for you to review and make changes directly in the portal. It is even harder for you to share it easily with your reviewers and also for them to pass on specific comments.
4. Upon submitting the application, you lose all the content that you dedicatedly wrote. Since most opportunities have similar questions and formats, the time you invest in one application form will save a lot of time for you in subsequent applications. And you will often be able to reuse the content you write once for multiple opportunities. So not saving the content you write now is going to be a mistake you wish you had not made.

Right. So now, let's call your copy of the application your working document.

You need to create a copy of the application form by copy-pasting all the application questions to your working document. We recommend Google Docs or Google Forms. This makes it super easy for you to handle, edit and share. It is also easy for your reviewers to offer comments on your application.

Once you finish your draft in your working document and you feel happy about it, you can go ahead, copy paste your answers into the main application form and submit it.

### 2. Creating your Checklist

Most applications have a lot of questions to answer and you might quite easily miss out on one or more of them. Sometimes, it is not just the questions themselves, but the specifics of the questions or even the deadline.

Suppose the application wants you submit your Resume in a *pdf format* and with file size less than 1MB. Ensuring that you finish your resume is one thing but making it fit to be submitted is another. So along with creating your resume, getting it reviewed, making suitable edits and finalising it, you will also have to ensure it is in pdf format and also less than 1 MB in size.

Likewise, say the deadline for your recommenders to submit their letters of recommendation is the same date as your application deadline. This means that you'll have to ensure that they finish up the letter and submit it along with you making your own application submission.

To get this done on time, you'll have to first decide on your recommenders, talk to them and obtain their confirmation, discuss your application with them, allow them sufficient time to write the letter. Finally remind them if they haven't been able to do it and also ensure that they submitted it before the deadline.

So even though the questions seem simple, the number of small tasks you need to do in completing them may be even more and with an application to write, you really might miss out on things.

This is why we recommend that you use a checklist. Before you begin, break things down to the smallest level, put them on your checklist and then tick them off one by one.

You may use common note-keeping tools. A google form or google keep also work well.

Do also remember to set yourself reminders few days prior to your deadline or any key activity. We are all humans and we may all forget dates and deadlines. But having your calendar remember it for you can save you big time.

### 3. Start filling the main application form

I know. We just discussed that we should be using a copy of the application form to fill in the application first.

And that still holds for all the major parts of your application like Essays, Resume and Video. We're talking about filling up your basic information such as Name, Email address, College and so on in the main application form.

**Why?** - If the opportunity uses a portal to manage applications, then upon signing up and starting your application, you will receive timely reminders on completing the application. You will also be notified about changes in deadline or application formats, if any. So ensuring that you create your profile and fill up your basic details will help you stay on top of all the information.

## Thinking through what you will be writing

Now you have your copy of the application, checklist ready. All you probably need to do is write away.

But what do you write about? Thinking through and figuring this out is what we'll discuss in this section.

Most applications have one or more of the following questions:

1. Your statement of purpose
2. What are your goals/passion?
3. Why do you wish to apply to this opportunity?
4. How would you use this opportunity to advance towards your goals?
5. What have you already done towards your goals?
6. Describe an adversity you have faced and how you overcame it.
7. Why should you be selected? OR What makes you an eligible candidate to be selected?

Essentially, to answer these questions well, you need clarity on:

**What your goals are. Both short and long term.**

**What have you already done about your goals.**

**Why this opportunity.**

**And How this opportunity connects with your goals.**

What is needed here are answers to these questions along with valid, legit experiences to substantiate your statements.

Sometimes, it might feel like a daunting task to figure out all these in our head and decide what to write about. You might either feel blank. Or you might even feel that you have multiple goals or interests.

What's needed here though is thinking through and trying to find that ***one goal*** or ***one area of interest that you wish to focus on.***

Truth is that we cannot really get to this out of the blue. So to help us get there, we can use few guideposts. This is where we go back to your research.

### Guidepost #1

What are the reviewers looking for? What does the selection criteria say?

Let's be honest. Unless and until there is a substantial connection between who you are, what you do and what they are looking for in a candidate, your chances of getting selected are slim.

So this should be your first filter. Decide to focus on areas that really matter to the opportunity.

For instance: If the opportunity is for computer science enthusiasts, then it is obvious that you need to emphasize on your skills in computer science. What could also work is demonstrating how you use computer science for the benefit of humanity.

So in this case, you should be thinking around your technical skills and how you use these to your benefit as well as that of others.

Let's take another example.

### **Guidepost #2**

Now that you have narrowed down to a theme of focus, you need to start thinking about the various experiences you have had.

Going by the same example,

What has your experience with technology been like?

Why do you like it?

What have you already done using technology?

What is the impact that you have created using technology?

Have you created direct impact by building tech or have you leveraged tech to solve problems?

Write them all down as you think through. And be specific with your experiences.

### **Guidepost #3**

Talk to people who know you well. This may be your friends, teachers or someone you have worked with. Ask them about their experiences with you and what they feel are your strengths in your focus area.

### **And finally,**

Ask yourself.

Why this opportunity?

What about it interests you? Why did you want to apply for it in the first place?

What are your goals?

Does the opportunity really fit in with your goals?

If you get selected, what about the opportunity will really take you closer to your goal?

Try to get yourself to find specific answers to these questions. I'm not saying that it is easy, but it definitely is worth it.

## Deciding on your Focus Point

Once you finish thinking through, you need to decide on the main focus of your application.

**Which is that one skill you possess that the reviewers are looking for in their ideal candidate?**

**Which is that one goal of yours that aligns with the vision of the opportunity?**

Let's take the case of WeTech Qualcomm Global Scholarship.

The WeTech Qualcomm Global Scholars Program awards scholarships (2000\$ grant) to female students in STEM from China, India, Taiwan and South Korea and matches each scholar with a mentor from a Qualcomm global or U.S. office in order to support and encourage the young women to succeed in their chosen fields.

**Now who are they looking for?**

A female student passionate about STEM. So here, your skills in technology and how well you leverage technology to solve problems come in to picture.

**What is the vision of the opportunity?**

To empower young women in STEM by supporting and encouraging them to succeed.

Let's take two cases of applicants here and see how answers to our two questions fit in.

### **Applicant 1**

Which is that one skill you possess that the reviewers are looking for in their ideal candidate?

*This applicant focuses on her technical skills. She emphasized on the projects and research she has done. Her letter of recommendation comes from the professor who guided her on one of her projects and further strengthens her point.*

Which is that one goal of yours that aligns with the vision of the opportunity?

*This applicant's goal is to become a leading female researcher.*

## Applicant 2

Which is that one skill you possess that the reviewers are looking for in their ideal candidate?

*This applicant focuses on her leadership skills. She is building a community of women in tech and empowering these women. Her application focuses on the impact she has created through her community and her letter of recommendation comes from an advisor to her initiative.*

Which is that one goal of yours that aligns with the vision of the opportunity?

*This applicant's goal is to build out her initiative into a full fledged organisation.*

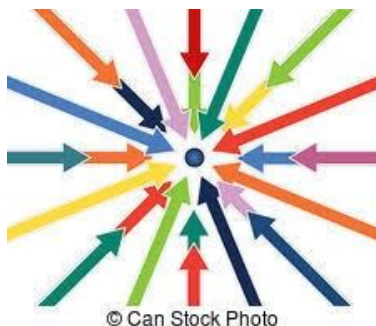
Do you see how these cases fit in well with who WeTech scholarship Reviewers might be looking for?

This is how you will also have to narrow down on your skills and goals. Once you decide upon what to focus, you should be using your personal experiences to point deeper towards your focus point.

For instance, in the question that asks you how the scholarship would help you reach closer to your goals, Applicant 1 might write that the financial aid will allow her pursue her research and the access to mentors from Qualcomm will open up more resources for her to understand the cutting edge research happening in companies like Qualcomm and eventually be a part of it.

While, Applicant 2 might write that she would open up the learning she gets from the network of technologists and leaders to her entire community of women, which in turn would help her strengthen her community.

Likewise, you will have to keep tying each answer of yours back into your focus theme using specific, relevant, personal experiences as examples.



**If the dot is your key focus theme, you use everything else to reinforce it.**



**Why should you have goals?**

Well, if you feel “I don’t have any goals”, then it is time you start thinking about it. It is quite natural to not have thought about it. Everyone begins there. But at some point we all should and this might just be the first time you get yourself to have the serious talk with yourself.

It’s not like the goal you decide for yourself now will be what you will have to do in your life. People change and so do their goals. As you evolve and discover more about yourself and the world, you’ll have new challenges, new interests and even new goals.

And that is perfectly fine!

But what’s important is that you have some goal at every point of your life. Goals give you direction and always having something larger than you to get to and working towards it will ensure that you keep making progress.

## Writing your shitty first draft

You have your familiarisation done, you have thought through what to write about and now you have to actually sit down and write up that application.

It is totally understandable that you may be beginning with a blank page and might be wondering how to write all that's in your head. If you do feel so, relax. It is completely normal and almost all applicants go through this every single time they fill in an application.

There is one way to get over this obstacle and get moving and that is by Writing your Shitty First Draft. What does this mean?

You begin writing by picking a question, reading it through and then writing all that comes to your mind, without any filtering. You don't think about the word limit or the quality of your answers. You just write. This version of your application is meant to be shitty and incomplete, which is why it is called the **Shitty First Draft (SFD)**.

What this exercise does is bring out all the content in your head onto paper. Now all you'd need to do is go over the questions, decide which aspects of your SFD to include and then start cleaning it up. As you complete your review process, you'll again get new pointers based on which you can refine your application.

But for starters, quickly iterating to your shitty first draft is important so that you begin making progress on your answers. When you write it all out, you would definitely feel relieved that some progress happened. Just be sure not to bother about the content/word limit/grammar or any filtering of the data as you write. Give yourself permission to create a first draft that may be shitty.

If you do commit to this process, you'd most probably get to your SFD in just about an hour or two. From there, it is only a matter of reviewing and refining it.

And truth is that you needn't show this to anyone. This is for your eyes only. So there's no need to feel embarrassed or awkward. Give yourself the permission to let it flow and do not judge your work. Every beautiful sculpture was once just a stone.

Few resources on SFD for you to understand more:

1. [The art of Shitty First Draft](#)
2. [Give yourself permission to start shitty](#)

## Review

Your shitty first draft is just an overflow of thoughts. That is your raw material. Now you need to begin to carve out the specifics of your responses from this raw material. And the single-most powerful tool that is going to help you here is **Reviewing your application**.

Often times, when we are extremely focussed on a particular topic, our thinking gets pointed and we tend to miss out on a lot of things. A review draws our attention to these things we missed to notice. Involving others who know you well in reviewing your application can also bring to light different perspectives about the experiences you have had. You may never have thought about your own experiences in the angles that they perceived it, which is exactly why widening your understanding based on feedback is important.

Once you finish your SFD, you may first do a self-review and iterate to version 1. Once you get to a version of your application that you are comfortable with sharing, you may reach out to your peers and well-wishers in helping your review your application.

Let's talk about these in detail:

### Self-Review

Ideally, taking a short break after your SFD, before you get to review your application can be healthy. This is so that you get some time to break off from the stream of thoughts you were in for the last couple of hours while writing the SFD. Giving yourself some mindspace will help you think about different examples, perspectives and ideas. While you take the break, it might also be good for you to run through your research notes. Brush up on who the opportunity really is for, what the organisation's vision is, what you decided as your focus theme and also your own thoughts about why you decided to apply.

Get back to your draft. Take up one question at a time. Read through the question 2-3 times until you really understand what you are expected to answer.

Now read through your SFD answer and see if it fits. In most cases, you will quickly pick up areas that you wish to change and start making those changes. As you do so, see if you can take your answer a step closer to your focus theme.

Do this for all questions and you have your version 1 ready.

Usually, this step is way easier than writing the SFD. But even after completing your version 1, if you feel that your application is incomplete, then it means that the focus theme you have picked

doesn't fit. The fundamental theme of focus is itself out of focus. If this happens, then no matter how much you try to make it better, it will never seem to fit in right.

What you should do in this case is go back to your research. Understand why you wanted to apply in the first place. See if your own interests match with the objective of the opportunity. Re-evaluate your focus theme and get back to the drawing board when you feel it is more crisp and aligned to the program.

The idea is to iterate to version 1, which you are happy about. Once this is done, it is time for a peer review.

## Peer-Review

You have a version that you feel is okay or maybe good? Now it is time for someone else to look at it and share feedback.

### Who should your reviewer be?

Ideally, your reviewer should be someone

- Who knows you well
- Who knows your work well
- Who cares about you and wants your good
- Who knows about the opportunity and what they might be looking for
- Who will deliver honest feedback about your application

Your reviewer can be your friend, your professor in college, your supervisor or manager at any organisation you have worked. As long as they fit the above criteria, you are good to go.

### Why is it important that they know you well?

Unless and until a reviewer does not really know you and your work, they will not be able to offer quality feedback on your application. You are not looking for someone to proofread your application. Instead, what you want is someone to critically read through, tell you about any potential points you may have missed to include, evaluate the authenticity of your application and even give you honest feedback on whether your application is good or not.

A person who does not know you well will only be able to offer surface level inputs on how you should beautify your application. And that is what matters least while you are still trying to fix the skeleton of your application.

### How to request for a review?

Once you decide who your reviewers are going to be, you need to get to requesting for a review. Before you proceed, there is something you must absolutely internalise.

Getting this review done is important to you. And the reviewer offering to take out time for you is doing you a favour. So it is extremely important for you to respect their time. Even if the reviewer is your best friend or if it is a working professional with a full time job. You ought to respect their time.

This means that you need to be make it as easy as you can for them to go over your application and offer feedback.

### Best practices

#### 1. **Intimate your reviewers well in advance.**

Give them enough time to review your application. You cannot be reaching out to them 2 hours before the application asking for a review and expect them to do it for you. They might do it out of their good heart. But it is strictly unprofessional and disrespectful to them.

#### 2. **Give them all the information they need to do the review.**

This includes providing your reviewer sufficient context about the opportunity, why you wish to apply and what you look forward to gaining from it. Along with this, you also should share your complete application with them. For the reviewer to make sense of how you have positioned yourself, they will need to look at all the application elements together. So do remember to share your entire application including essays, resume, video and other elements.

#### 3. **Decide on a time for the review and show up on time.**

Once you share information with your reviewer, it might a good idea to give them few hours/days to take a look at it. It is best that both of you agree upon a time that suits you both and set up a call or meeting. Do remember to show up exactly on time for the meeting.

#### 4. **Take notes if needed.**

As you discuss through, make sure you take notes wherever needed. This will help you remember all that you discussed about and will come handy later. Taking the review discussion casually, looking at it as the two of you chat over coffee and forgetting all the important points you need to incorporate in your application might not work well.

#### 5. **Be open to feedback.**

When your reviewer is passing on his/her feedback, stay open minded and be receptive to all that they are saying. Try and understand their point of view and why they think certain

improvements should be made. An honest review might be a painful process. You might have thought that your application was amazing. But if your reviewer says it is not for x,y,z reasons, don't take it to heart yet. Peacefully listen through and be open to consideration.

## 6. **Don't blindly follow feedback**

Yes, your reviewers might know you well and have taken effort to offer you feedback. But this does not mean that you should blindly follow any of it. When the review is done, you must sit down to think about what they said. Critically evaluate the feedback and accept it only if you think it makes sense.

## 7. **Remember to thank your reviewers**

Finally, irrespective of whether you use the feedback in your application or not, you should thank them for their time and effort. If their feedback did come handy, you should definitely let them know that it did.

### **How to request for a review?**

Once you decide on your reviewers, intimate them well before time. Write your potential reviewer an email and brief them about your request. As discussed, remember to share all relevant information and make it easier for them.

Let's look at the points you can include in this email:

- **Greetings and Purpose of the email** - Say a Hi and then let them know that you are writing in to request a review of your application.
- **About the opportunity** - Give them more information about the opportunity, Share relevant links wherever necessary to help them read through. But remember to not share just links. Summarise the whole opportunity in few lines, making it easier for them to quickly understand.
- **Why them?** - Telling the reviewers why you decided to take their help in reviewing your application can really nudge them to help you out. Besides, it makes them feel good too.
- **Request for review** - Finally close it out by seeking their consent in reviewing your application. It might also be good for you to confirm how they wish to deliver the feedback. Some people like leaving comments on the application, some prefer emails, some prefer calls while others prefer meeting in person. Giving them the flexibility to choose what works for them might be a good idea.
- Before you close, **Remember to thank them.**

Once your reviewer accepts your request and agrees to review your application, you can follow up by providing further details:

You may include the following points in your email:

- **Thank them for accepting your request**
- **Share your application** - Tell them about your focus theme and also share your entire application with them.
- **Set a time to discuss** - Based on how your reviewer wishes to deliver feedback, set up a time for your call/meetup. If they decide to leave comments or share feedback over email, then you can skip this step.

Once your review discussion is done, go back and thank them for their time. This can also go out as an email and you may include the following points:

- Mention the specific feedback you found useful
- Mention how their review has helped you in improving your application
- Thanks them.

When this is done, reflect back on the feedback and edit out your application accordingly.

Congratulations. You have successfully completed one entire review cycle. Welcome to version 2 :)

### How many reviews should you do

Theoretically, the answer here is as many as you wish to, to get to a draft you are happy with. But practically, too much of anything can also be bad. Since all reviewers share feedback based on their perspectives about the program and you, some of these reviews might be contradictory. And an overload of comments can make you even more confused than when you were before.

Given the context, a self-review and 2 peer reviews is a sweet spot. It provides room for different perspectives to come in but also doesn't provide room for way too many perspectives either.

### **Remember, quality is in the review.**

A good, honest review can be time-consuming and even painful at times. But sticking through the process and honouring it can do wonders. So even when you feel this takes up too much of your time or that it is unnecessary even, remember that the quality really lies in the review.

## Resolving your queries

As you get started on the application process and go through it, you will have many questions come your way. Below are few ways in which you can go about addressing these queries.

### **1. Read through the Organisation's Website and FAQs thoroughly**

Most basic questions you might have regarding eligibility or the application process will be answered in the organisation's website or FAQs. Read through these to find your answers.

### **2. Google**

If your questions is generic, such as "How long should the resume be?" or "Who should I pick as my recommenders", you can consider googling for these. You will find tons of resources online that can help you answer these.

### **3. Ask your fellow applicants**

If you know other students applying along with you, you may ask them too. Since they are also going through the application process with you, chances are that they also might have encountered similar problem and even figured it out.

### **4. Write to the support email**

If you have tried the above methods and feel that you still have not received an answer to your question or if your question can only be answered by the organisation hosting the opportunity, feel free to write to support email of the organisation with your query.

## Best Practices on Drafting your Query

When you write to the organisation requesting a response to your query, these are some best practices you can follow:

### **Provide detailed information**

You may be reporting a technical issue or clarifying something. But whatever it be, ensure that you provide sufficient background for them to answer the question. In places where you can include a screenshot or the error or detail about your problem, ensure that you do it. This makes it way easier for them to evaluate your problem without the need to subsequent back and forth.

### **Give them time**

You might be in a hurry to get a response, but ensure you give them time. Typically, support email responses come with a 24 hour delay. So expect the delay and write them the query as soon as you encounter it.



## Sample Email

Writing to GHCI team, clarifying whether the question on Video Testimonial is mandatory.

### About the Video Testimonial 📹



**Arya Murali** <hello@aryamurali.com>  
to AnitaB.org, Volunteers ▾

Dear Team,

I happened to come across the video testimonial question in the GHCI scholarship application.

This is how the question reads:

**"You have the option to share a video..."** (PFA Screenshot)

What I understand from this help text is that submitting the video testimonial is optional.

#### Video Testimonial

You have the option to share a video, with:

- a brief introduction
- why you would like to attend GHCI 18
- how you hope to benefit from the experience

The video should not be longer than 2-3 minutes. Common video sharing sites can be used. Please enter the link below.

However, upon filling the form and hitting the submit button, I get an error message that says the Video testimonial is mandatory.

**Errors:** Your changes have **not** been saved; please correct the errors below and resubmit.

The 'Video Testimonial' field is required. [jump to error](#)

The 'Proof of Student Status' file is not recognizable as one of the allowed file types (gif, jpeg, and pdf). Make sure that it is one of the allowed types, and that it ends with the appropriate extension. [jump to error](#)

The 'CV / Resume' field has 65 pages, but must have no more than 3. [jump to error](#)

Could you please clarify which of these is true? And if the testimonial is indeed mandatory, could you please edit the help text also suitably to avoid the confusion?

Thanks much.

## Rethink's Peer Learning Communities

We have learning communities where applicants of a specific opportunity can interact amongst each other and also clarify their queries. These communities are on telegram and work really well in providing peer support while applying to these opportunities.

[Why peer learning?](#)

[How to join our communities?](#)

v@r (volunteers@rethinkfoundartion.in)

v@r is your window to reach us safely and personally. If you feel you have unanswered queries about opportunities after following all the above steps, feel free to write in to [volunteers@rethinkfoundartion.in](mailto:volunteers@rethinkfoundartion.in) and we shall facilitate guidance as best as possible.

Do note that we are not the official authority offering the scholarship and so can only provide guidance on how you can go about your queries. They are not to be seen as full and final or as an official response.

## Common Application Questions and Guidance

This section will cover some common application questions you might encounter and our guidance on how you can answer them.

But before that, some generic guidance.

The person reviewing your application might not know you. What you need to now do is help the reviewer paint a picture of yours using the information you provide in your resume, essays and recommendation letters.

### Best Practices

#### **Be authentic**

Throughout your application, bring out your authentic self. What this really means is that you must be honest and genuine. Faking it is going to only break it. When your experiences don't add up to what you write, the reviewers will figure out that you're bluffing. Being authentic, honest is the best way for you to put in a good application.

#### **Bring out your focus theme**

After your research and thought exercise, you should have finalised on the focus theme for your application. This would be a particular skill of yours that you wish to bring through and also a goal of yours to tie the story to. Through your essays, resume and recommendations, ensure that you keep reinforcing on your focus theme using examples and personal stories.

#### **Be specific**

Being generic, particularly in essays is very easy. But remember that one key way of making your application unique is by being specific about what you have done and what you intend to do further. You can do this in two ways:

1. *By using personal experiences and stories*  
Quote an incident that suits where you demonstrated a skill. Share a personal challenge you went through.
2. *By using numbers*  
You may also add in numbers to emphasize on the impact you have created.
3. *By mentioning specific points and actions you plan to take*  
In places where you are expected to explain how you plan to use the opportunity and the rewards you get, be specific about what you plan to do, why and how you are going to do it.

**Stick to Word limit**

Most essays have a word limit. And such a limit has been kept because they want you to honour it. So stick to it as far as possible.

In some cases, if your essays go over the word limit, you may not be allowed to make a submission also. It is best to avoid such circumstances and instead stick to the limit.

**Think from the Reviewers perspective**

As you write your application, do keep in mind about what more the reviewers would need to complete your picture in their mind. This will help you account for most questions the reviewers might have while going through your application.

## Essays

Essays are a major part of most applications. It is a key source of information for the reviewers to know more about you, your goals and your work.

The approach to attempting your essays is same as what we have discussed. You write your SFD, then review and refine it.

This segment will focus on few common essay questions and guidance on approaching them.

### Common essay questions

#### **Your statement of purpose**

Your Statement of Purpose a.k.a Personal Statement an essay that seeks to understand your life, the motivations for your chosen career path and your goals. The SOP essay typically is expected to be 500-1000 words long. But some opportunities have also asked you to draft an SOP in 100 words.

#### *What to include in your SOP?*

4 main points in your SOP can really tell your story:

1. What are your short and long term goals?
2. How did these goals develop?
3. Have you already begun working towards these goals?
4. How does the opportunity fit in with your goals?

[Here's](#) a detailed document on how you can look to approach your SOP.

#### **What are your goals/passion?**

This question is quite straightforward. You are generally expected to write about your goals, interests, how these goals developed and what you have already done towards them.

#### **Why this opportunity?**

This question is where you explore why you decided to apply this opportunity and how it fits in with your goals. What do you hope to gain from the opportunity? How do you think that is going to help you advance towards your goals?

#### **How would you use this opportunity to advance towards your goals?**

Here, you are required to pick specific aspects about the opportunity and detail out how you'd make the most of these opportunities.

**Describe an adversity you have faced and how you overcame it.**

This question requires you to think about a 'relevant' adversity you faced, share your personal story and also mention how you overcame it. Do note that it is best that it be related to your focus theme and your career in general.

**Why should you be selected? OR What makes you an eligible candidate to be selected?**

This section is where you talk more about yourself, your accomplishments, how you are a perfect fit for the program. Do not feel that you are boasting here. You are actually required to speak more about your achievements.

**How do you plan on utilising the financial aid you receive?**

If you would be receiving a financial aid to support your education or a particular project you are working on, use this section to detail out how you would use the money. Do you wish to use the money to buy yourself a laptop? Or go to a conference you've long had in mind? Do you want to invest the money in your social cause or startup? Provide a specific response as to how you intend to use the money rather than make generic statements.

**Describe an experience where you demonstrated leadership.**

In this question, you should get to the specific details of an instance where you demonstrated leadership. Talk in detail about the background behind this scene, how you came into picture and how your action made an impact.

## Recommendation Letters

A recommendation letter is written by a previous employer, colleague, teacher, or by someone else who can recommend your work or academic performance.

The goal of recommendation letters is to vouch for your skills, achievements, and aptitude. Letter of Recommendation (LoR) is a vote of confidence a person has in you and will help in making a compelling case on why you must be selected.

**Who should be your recommenders?**

The key to picking your recommenders is finding someone whose recommendation aligns deeply with your focus theme. What's the key skill of yours that you are looking to highlight in your application? Which experience of yours strongly demonstrates this key skill? Once you boil down to those experiences, you need to pick someone in a supervisory position involved with you in the experience.

This person may be your teacher, team-lead or supervisor at an organisation you worked at. Whoever you decide to pick, the person should be able to clearly demonstrate the kind of professional relationship you had with them, your shared experiences and comment upon your skills and work ethic.

This means that an inevitable criteria while providing recommendations is that the recommender needs to know you well and should be able to authentically comment on your work. Be careful to select someone who has positive thoughts on your work.

Additionally, the person should also have time to write you a good letter.

Summarizing, pick someone

- who can reinforce your focus theme and key skill
- who knows you well
- who thinks positively about your work
- who has the time to write you a good letter

### **How should you request for recommendation letters?**

The first and foremost rule when it comes to requesting recommendations is that you should communicate with your recommender about the opportunity you are applying to and request for a letter of recommendation.

Now how should you communicate and what should you convey for them to write an effective LoR?

An email is always the recommended medium for you to send in a request. But if your recommender is comfortable with speaking with you over call or meeting you in person, these work fine as well.

When you do communicate with your recommender, be sure to provide information about:

- The opportunity you are applying to. (Share relevant websites and info here)
- Why are you applying to the opportunity and what do you expect to gain from it?
- What is a key skill or accomplishment of yours that you want the recommender to focus on in their LoR?
- Why did you pick this person as your recommender?

Sharing your application with your recommender might also be a good idea to help them understand how you have positioned yourself throughout.

You may also request your recommenders to share their LoR with you. Once you receive the LoR, you should look to proofread it. While reading through, if you notice something seriously awry with the letter of recommendation – an error in dates, for example, or a misspelled company name – it's perfectly OK to ask the recommender for a quick fix.

When requesting for recommendations, you should always look to make it easier for your recommender to write in the LoR. Be sure to respect their time and share all information they might need upfront. Throughout the process, if they have any queries, do make time to help them navigate. Finally, ensure that you thank them for taking out time for you.

## **FAQs**

### **Is there a specific format to be used? Should the letter be on a company/college Letterhead?**

This really varies from opportunity to opportunity. See to it that you read through the details mentioned by the particular opportunity before you make a conclusion.

In most cases, there are no hard and fast rules about how the letter must be written. Some opportunities may require your recommender to comment on specific points. In such cases, your recommender should definitely address those points.

Some opportunities also require the recommender to save the letter in a specific format or name the letter in a particular way. These details must also be kept in mind before submitting the letter.

### **Can a fellow student recommend me?**

A fellow student may be able to recommend you provided the student has clearly worked with you in an organisation and has directly managed/lead or supervised your work.

### **Can a family member recommend?**

It is generally advised that your family members do not recommend for you. However if you have a clear professional working experience with them to showcase, such as working under them in a Project or Organisation, then they may be able to recommend you strictly on the basis of your professional experience.

If this family member is only your mentor/coach or guide, it is best that you do not list her as your recommender.



## Video

Most applications have a particular topic upon which you will have to create your video. It could be about. The topics may be quite similar to the essay questions also.

What you'd be expected to do is shoot a video on the topic, detailing all the points you are expected to be speaking on, upload the video to a popular video sharing website and then share the link in the application form.

Since the word limit in some applications may be stringent, you have only so much space to express your ideas and experiences fully. This is where the video might come in handy. You can really make use of your time in front of the camera to share a personal story that will add in more credibility to your application.

## Best Practices

### **Be natural**

It is a good idea to always be your natural self. Speak as if you are having a comfortable conversation with the reviewers but don't be too lousy either. Stick to the point and be original.

### **Stick to the time limit**

In most cases, you will be asked to restrict your video within a particular time limit. Sticking to this guideline is a good practice. The reviewers will be taking a look at multiple videos and they'd have only so much time to watch through your video. So having a super long video explaining everything might bore them and increase chances of them breaking out of the thread as well.

### **Be confident**

If you don't believe in what you are saying, chances are that the reviewers will also not believe in you. So no matter what you are saying, say it with confidence, Say it with conviction.

### **Don't mind your language proficiency**

Remember, the purpose of the video is to get to know you and your persona slightly better. It is not to check on how eloquently you can speak. So there's no need to bother much about your language proficiency and how well an orator you are.

### **Be clearly visible and audible**

Ensure that the audio and visuals of your video are clean. If the reviewer cannot see or hear your properly, it is going to keep bothering them as they watch the video.

## How to shoot a video

Most applications require you to use just your mobile camera or laptop camera to shoot the video. It needn't be of professional quality.

Common video shooting tools can be used.

### **Macbook**

Photo Booth

QuickTime

### **Windows**

Camera App

## **Video editing tools**

Sometimes, in your videos, you may want to share your screen, add text or even pictures. There are a few editing tools you can use to do this easily.

- [OBS](#)
- [iMovie](#)
- [Sony Vegas Pro](#)
- <https://typito.com/>
- [Airdroid](#) (To share android screen)

## **Common video sharing sites**

Once you shoot and edit your videos, you'll need to upload it to a common video sharing site. These are some common websites you may use:

- [Youtube](#)
- [Vimeo](#)
- [Dailymotion](#)

## **How to upload a video to YouTube?**

In order to upload a video to YouTube, you first need to create a channel on YT. Once you set up your account and create your channel, you can upload a video from your computer.

[Here's](#) a resource video to help you.

**Sharing settings**

YouTube gives you three sharing settings while sharing your videos. You can decide to make your videos:

- Public - Anyone the web can see your video
- Unlisted - Only people with the link to the video can see it
- Private - Only you can see it

Typically, while sharing your video in the application form, you should ensure that you sharing setting is either Public or Unlisted.

# Resume

## What is a Resume/CV?

A resume or CV is a document that summarises your work experience, education, skills and achievements for a prospective employer.

## What should you include in your Resume?

Typically Resumes include your Name and contact details, Education background, Work Experience/Projects, Skills, Hobbies, Awards and so on.

Even within these, how do you select which experiences to include? Should I include school level projects? — Include your latest projects/experiences first. The reviewers would want to know that you are an active student and that you keep learning. You can include few of your school level achievements that you are most proud of also.

## Embellishing your Resume

While you need only the aforementioned titles to create a basic resume, you can take it up a notch by including links to your Personal Website/Blog, Linked In Profile or Github Repo.

Creating your own personal website that showcases your projects might be a great idea. It will definitely help the reviewer understand more about you as a person and your work so far.

Checkout the following personal websites for some inspiration:

1. [Rohan Saxena, Google Venkat Panchapakesan Scholar 2017](#)
2. [Arvind Sanjeev, Interaction Designer](#)

You can use Google sites to quickly create your own website. It is super easy and can be done in just about 2 hours. Checkout [this tutorial](#) to learn more. You can also google for “Create a website using Google Sites”. You’d find a lot of useful resources.

What you can also do is start a blog on [medium.com](#). It is a beautiful writing tool. You can write about your work so far, your learnings and your experiences.

## How long should my Resume be?

1–2 pages is ideal. You really wouldn’t need more than 2 pages. Do look to stay within 2 pages and curate the content to fit in those 2 pages. Include only what is relevant to your work in the technology space. Anything that showcases your tech/managerial/leadership skills, it is a yes.

Why 1–2 pages? About 1000 students apply to a quality opportunity. Reviewing all these is not easy. Naturally, you can expect the reviewers to only skim through quickly, reading the main titles. So the first impression your resume makes and the titles you include will make the most impact. It is not the length that would matter, but the quality of what you have included already. So keeping it short, to the point and specific might be a good idea.

### **Which format should I pick?**

There are tons of Resume formats out there. There is no good or bad format. It all depends on whether the resume does justice to your experiences. So pick one that you feel most comfortable with.

If you have a specific format in which the resume is to be published, do make a note of it. If not, going with pdf version is generally safe simply because it looks neat and remains just the way you created it, irrespective of the device or software one uses to view it. If you use doc/docx, the view may change depending on the version of Microsoft Word the reviewers are using.

### **Should it be colourful?**

Upto you. How you design your resume is completely up to you. But when you do so, prioritise just one thing — Readability. It might look pretty but finally if they can't read anything, it makes no sense right?

Ensure you use a neat font. Something like Times New Roman, Arial or Roboto. (NOT Comic Sans). Use a 10–12 point font size. And pick colours that aren't too flashy.

Sometimes, you may have to print out hard copies of your resume. So, you must ensure that your Resume would come out neat and be readable in both black and white as well as colour formats.

### **Should I add in my Picture?**

Honestly, this is debatable. There is no right or wrong. For one, you adding your picture may or may not influence the selection process. What you have done and written about in your Resume surely does.

No matter how good or bad you look in your picture, if your resume isn't strong and if it doesn't fit the selection criteria, you'll not make it through. So while at it, if you feel like adding a picture go ahead. But if you feel that it eats up a lot of space, you may leave it be.

### **Which softwares can I use to create my Resume?**

You can use Microsoft Word or Google Docs to create a basic resume. Google Docs already has templates included that you can make use of. [This blog shows how you can create a Resume using Google Docs.](#)

[canva.com](https://www.canva.com) also has a lot of wonderful, colourful Resume templates if that's where your taste lies. Canva lets you customise them quickly for free.

### **Is there a particular format that would work?**

There is no one formula that works right. If there was one, then wouldn't everyone be successful? Wouldn't everyone have the same kind of Resume or Essays?

The closest you can get is to look at the Resumes that won Previous Recipients the scholarship. But even that's not the formula you can look for. It worked for them but you cannot say that it was because their Resume was a one-page document or because they used a particular format. Their experiences would have weighed in way more than the format or appearance. So instead of worrying about the length or beauty of it, you are better off focussing on the content more. What you write in there will finally make all the difference.

### **Can I use the same resume for all opportunities?**

No. Your resume is never a one size fits all. You should always tailor your resume to suit each opportunity, with your focus theme in mind.

### **When sharing your experiences, feeling as if you are boasting about it can be a common insecurity. What do you in such a case?**

First of all, congrats on all your achievements. Remember, you took the time, effort and pain to do things in life and eventually accomplish them. You deserve to be celebrated for it.

So instead of feeling like you are boasting about it, the feeling you really must possess is pride. You consciously underplaying your achievements and skills is NOT modesty. It is NOT you being nice. Maybe it is so in your head but that's not what the reviewers are going to think.

If you cannot deliver what you have already accomplished with confidence, if you keep second-guessing yourself, then the reviewers might feel that you are bluffing about it. That maybe you really did not accomplish these and that you may be just making up stories.

This is why you must sell yourself well (if not oversell). Take pride in your work and confidently talk about it. Be confident and aggressive to the point of a fault.

## File managing made easy

When you begin applying to opportunities, you will need to create and manage a lot of files. Files such as your essays, Resume, scanned copy of your college ID, copy of your mark lists and so on.

So how do you easily manage your files?

The traditional way of managing files is by saving them on your Desktop. Sometimes you have designated folders where you keep these files safe.

But today, there are online file storage systems associates with your email ID available for you. Such systems help you save your files in the cloud and access them wherever you are, just by logging in to your email ID.

Sharing these files from cloud storage is way easier than our traditional sharing method of attaching them as well.

There are a number of options available to you - Google Drive, DropBox, Microsoft OneDrive, iCloud and so on. Which service you wish to use is entirely up to you.

What we will also look at in this segment is how you can manipulate your files to change their size or formats. Different opportunity application portals require you to share your documents in different formats and sizes. That's where this skill comes into play.

Let's begin exploring some useful file-management and manipulation techniques.

### **Scanning files**

You are sometimes required to scan a copy of your college ID, photo identification ID or marklists.

To scan files, you can either use the inbuilt scan document option available in [Google Drive](#) or use apps such as [CamScanner](#).

### **Templates to quickly create documents**

A key feature of Google Drive is the ability to create documents quickly using templates. Google Docs offers quick templates to create a resume and comes pretty handy.

You can also use the templates to write a cover letter or a letter of recommendation.

[Here's a blog on using google docs to create a Resume.](#)

**Naming Files**

Earlier, we used to create files and save them in folders for us to easily locate them. But today, with the ability to search for files coming in, it is much easier to locate files by searching for its name. This is where using relevant file names become important.

It is good to include your name in your files, especially while saving documents such as your Resume and sharing them along with your applications. Having your name in can be significantly helpful to the reviewers in quickly understanding that the file is yours.

**Locate files by search**

Most cloud storage systems give you the option to locate files included using search. This is a quick and easier way of locating your files. Practicing to properly name your files and find them by searching can be a good skill to acquire.

**Resizing files**

Sometimes, you are required to resize your files and images before you upload them onto the application portal. There are multiple tools online to resize files.

Here's one such tool for resizing images: <https://www.reduceimages.com/>

Here's a tool to resize pdf files: <https://pdfresizer.com/resize>

**Editing and converting to different formats**

There are lots of tools online that allow you to merge pdf documents, edit them, convert files to various formats. <https://www.ilovepdf.com/> is one such helpful tool.



# Best Practices on Applying to Opportunities

Let's look at some best practices to follow while applying to opportunities

## **Start early**

One of the best things you can do to yourself is give yourself the time to prepare and submit a good application. Start working on your application as soon as you know about it. This allows you to make room for mistakes and further improvement.

## **Do your Research**

Doing a proper research before you start applying is extremely important for you to really understand what the opportunity is about and even whether or not it is apt for you. The time you spend on researching is never a waste.

## **Use emails**

Most opportunities and organisations knock on your email inbox (door). Emails are a professional medium of communication and the world still runs on them. So using emails to communicate with your recommenders, reviewers and even with the organisation offering the opportunity is a professional thing to do.

## **Check your inbox regularly**

This is a good habit to have generally. But particularly so if you are applying to an opportunity. As mentioned, emails are the medium of communication for most opportunities and if you are not on top of your mails, you might miss out on most of the information coming in.

## **Always draft your application in a rough document**

When you are initially filling up your application, you need enough space to play around with the content, easily make changes and share it with your reviewers and recommenders. This is why using a rough document before you fill in responses in the main application can be useful. Additionally, having a copy of your application saved for future reference will prove helpful in future when applying to other similar applications.

## **Give your recommenders and reviewers enough time**

Your recommenders and reviewers are your well-wishers and they are helping you put in a successful application. The least you can do is allow them the time to do it well. Respect their time and give them enough space to do the needful.

## **Make time for review**

Plan your work to accommodate reviews into it. Quality lies in the review and they are super helpful in improving your application. Ensure you make time for it.

**Try to find answers to your questions on your own**

Most students ask away every single question they encounter. Now this is not a good practice especially if you could have easily found the answer to the question yourself. What you can do is first try to find the answer on your own and then ask for it if you are not able to find it.

**Apply few hours before the deadline**

Typically, applicants put in the application right before the deadline. Because of the sudden rush, systems fail and crash. Finally, they'd not be able to submit the application. To avoid this situation, it might be a good practice for you to wind up your application and submit it 3-6 hours before the deadline.

**Never submit the application early**

Never never submit your application too early. Always allow yourself enough time to review, review and review until you are really happy with the application. Take all the time you have got. Sometimes, some critical guidance will come to you a day before. And because you would have already submitted your application, you may not be able to make use of this guidance. Such situations may put you in a backfoot.

The only exception to this point is when the selections happen on a rolling basis. In cases where selections happen and slots get filled as time progresses, you are actually better off submitting your application early, to avoid the last minute rush. In all other situations, it works better to submit the application no earlier than a day prior to the deadline.

## Improving your odds of getting selected

All of us wish to apply and get selected to opportunities. Having that coveted scholarship, internship with your dream company and winning a challenging competition is a way of proving our mettle and also taking one step closer to our goals.

But when there is a lot of competition, how do we differentiate ourselves? How do we pick up the skills needed and build a profile that reviewers cannot say no to?

While we may not know what exactly would make your application click, there are some things that you can do to improve your odds. And it is not just about getting selected but also about building the right skills that will make you career-ready.

The key point here is to take up substantial responsibility to do a piece of work. Whether you do this by creating your own project or you take up the responsibility within an organisation as a part of your volunteering activity or internship.

Let's now look at some activities you can take up in this regard. Do note that not all these activities carry equal weightage. The impact that some of these will have on your profile will be way greater than others.

To give you a sense of how these rank, we have organised them in decreasing order of importance.

### **Own project**

Doing a project is a great way to learn deeper about your interest areas. By practically working around themes of your choice and actually demonstrating outcomes, you portray that you have acquired the required skills to accomplish such outcomes. It also shows that you have a practical, hands-on experience along with theoretical understanding.

When you travel to meetups and networking conferences, you can begin by introducing yourself as someone who is building a project and not just as a student.

### **Internship**

Getting some professional work experience right while in college can help you assess work environments and understand the kind of work you would like to pursue upon graduation. Internships are a great way to associate with companies that interest you and try working there before actually joining in.

**Online presence**

Your online presence matters. People actually search for you online. So what about you is up on the internet and what people make of it matter much. Building out a decent online presence can definitely be an investment.

**Publishing your work**

It is important not just to do things but also to talk about it or in other words, publish information online. This ties back to you having an online presence and also about you being credible enough.

Whether you do a project, work with an organization or win a competition, it is always good practice to share news about it along with your learning. So how did you find that volunteering opportunity? How did you prepare to win the competition? People like to know these things and you sharing all this information will only add to your accolades and make you seem trustworthy.

If you code, try making open source contributions. If you have a leadership role in an organisation, write about your experiences, challenges and impact.

If you are doing a project or researching on something, try and get it published on a journal or present it at a conference.

All that you share will finally add up.

**Volunteering**

Volunteering with organisations is a great way to experience leadership, teamwork and also participate in creating real impact. You pick up a lot of real-world professional skills as well.

Identify a cause that you relate to and see if you can work with an organisation that shares your values and interests.

**Conferences and Meetups**

Conferences are networking events where you meet and interact with like-minded people. Attending conferences around your area of interest is a good starting point for you to network and discover the kind of activity happening around the space. It is a wonderful opportunity for you to be updated about the latest happenings and also find new avenues to work on.

### **Online courses**

Whether you are interested in android development, digital marketing or even economics. There are tons of online courses available today that help you learn on the go and sometimes, even get certified.

Completing a nanodegree or an online course on a topic of your interest can further show that you really do have a keen interest towards learning the topic deeper.

Websites such as Udacity, Coursera, EdX, NPTEL offer courses you can take. They will make a great addition to your resume.

### **Competitions**

There are a number of amazing innovation challenges and competitions out there that you can participate in. Such competitions help you evaluate your ideas and capabilities. They sometimes even open up avenues for mentorship or financial aid in developing your ideas as well.

### **Involving in Communities**

Communities are a thing these days. They are best known for bringing people with similar interests together and foster shared learning among them. Depending on your interests, locating and joining such communities might help you connect with people of similar interests and also learn from them.

Contributing back to such communities by sharing your bit of learning with the community and hosting programs for them is also well appreciated.

## **General Guidance**

### ***Prepare well in advance and keep iterating***

Begin your process of utilising opportunities as soon as you can. Have your basic application elements such as Resume, essays et al ready. They may not be exceptional when you start off but in time, as you keep making progress, if you keep editing and refining them, they will stand out.

Ultimately if there is no flesh in your Resume, that is if you haven't really done anything while in college, there will be nothing that you'll be able to write on your Resume about. So it is important for you to always keep an eye on what you've already done and what more you can do to improve your profile.

***Keep applying to opportunities***

Sometimes you may have it all - a great project, wonderful Resume and a stellar Recommendation letter. But if you aren't able to successfully apply and write well about all that you have done, then you stay fall short.

This is why you need to keep applying to opportunities no matter what. Every time you apply, you learn something new and over time your application and knowledge about what works best for you becomes more clear.

It is only through experience that you can craft an application that truly stands out. It takes time, effort and requires you to keep applying until you break the code.

## Building some essential skills

Acquiring essential skills is an integral part of improving your chances of getting selected to such opportunities.

So what are 3 key skills you need to pick up?

1. Locating information using 'Search'
2. Emailing
3. Developing your online presence

In this section we will look at these skills slightly more deeper. Like every other skill, building these skills and truly adopting them takes time but it is absolutely worth it.

### Locating information using 'Search'

Information Literacy is a very important 21st century skill to possess.

*What does it mean?*

**Information literacy** is a set of abilities requiring individuals to "recognize when **information** is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed **information**."

The internet today is flooded with information. Chances are that all you need is available on it.

But all this information is no good if we do not know how to locate it, evaluate it and effectively use it.

This is where "Search skills" come into play. With highly efficient search engines existing today, finding information has never been easier. Which search engine you use is up to you. Here, we shall explore how you can use one such search engine - Google.

#### **How do you Google?**

Searching on google is real easy. All you need to do is type in what you wish to search for and hit the search button.

Let's try googling for the Venkat Panchapakesan Scholarship.

What you'd need to do is:

1. Open google.com
2. Type in ' Venkat Panchapakesan Scholarship'
3. Hit search

Now a lot of search results will load up and you can read through them to know more about the scholarship.

Getting a pro at googling is quite easy. The infographic below easily explains how to do this.

## Search Google Like a Pro

You know how to Google,  
but do you do it like a pro?

Here are a few simple yet very helpful search operators to help you  
Search Google... like a Pro

**“Quotation Marks”**      **“I love you Mom”**

Using quotation marks in your search terms lets you search exactly for that word. It means, all your results will have your search terms in them.

**- Dashes**      **dolphins -football**

If you want to exclude a term from your search include a hyphen before that word.

**~ Tilde**      **music ~classes**

Use tilde when you want also its synonyms to appear in the result. The above query will search for music classes, lessons, coaching etc.

**site:**      **site:ndtv.com**

Use this operator to search within a specific website only.

**| verticle bar**      **blouse | shirt | chemise**

This query will search websites that have any one/two/all of the terms

**.. Two Periods**      **movies 1950..1970**

Include two periods when you want to search within two number ranges

Sources :  
[www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

Infographic by : Splashsys Webtech  
[www.splashsys.com](http://www.splashsys.com)





## Emailing

### Importance of using emails

We have all heard about emailing and enough has been said about it. But why are emails important?

Emails are a professional communication medium. Emails are an excellent way of sharing heavy content as well as files.

Almost all organisations communicate on emails and as you enter the workforce, being equipped with writing good emails, following a proper email skills becomes important.

### Creating an Email ID

Pretty much the way your house has a physical postal address, you will have an email id to which people can write in.

There are a number of email service providers. Some of them are:

- Gmail
- Outlook
- Yahoo Mail
- Hotmail
- Rediffmail

And so on.

You may choose to pick any service provider you personally like but **we recommend that you use Gmail**. Gmail has a clean interface and also comes with a lot of extra functionalities that will help you productively manage your inbox. The G Suite toolbox provides you seamless file management system using Google Drive, a neat Calendar and even Apps Scripts for you to manipulate all these services and create custom tools for yourself.

## What should your email ID be?

When choosing to decide on how you must name your email id, it is good for you to follow some best practices.

- Avoid nicknames and fancy naming
- Avoid using complicated text and numbers that don't make sense. Especially remember to not use your birth year.
- Use either your first name, last name or a combination of both.
- Get yourself a domain specific email.

### Unprofessional Email examples

- [crazygirl123@gmail.com](mailto:crazygirl123@gmail.com)
- [anandrockz@gmail.com](mailto:anandrockz@gmail.com)
- [devimol@yahoo.com](mailto:devimol@yahoo.com)
- [aryam1995@gmail.com](mailto:aryam1995@gmail.com)

### Professional Email examples

- [enfarose@gmail.com](mailto:enfarose@gmail.com)
- [deepthi.av@gmail.com](mailto:deepthi.av@gmail.com)
- [skg@sijokuruvilla.in](mailto:skg@sijokuruvilla.in)
- [hello@aryamurali.com](mailto:hello@aryamurali.com)

## Using email address within an organisation

Some students tend to use their email ID within organisations they intern with or organisations they volunteer for, such as IEEE or ICloud. This works well as long as you use the email address only for purposes related to that organisation. For every other purpose NOT associated with the organisation, it is best recommended that you use your own personal email address.

Another blindside here is that the email service associated with such organization specific emails will work fine only as long as you have a valid membership. The moment you terminate your membership, the email becomes invalid. This will mean that you will no longer have access to the data or contacts you had while you used the email id.

This becomes an additional pain for people to reach you because when they try and send emails to you, the emails will bounce because such an email does not exist.

Here are two screenshots of email IDs that ceased to exist post membership, causing emails to these IDs to bounce.



### Delivery incomplete

There was a temporary problem delivering your message to [redacted]@icloud.com. Gmail will retry for 21 more hours. You'll be notified if the delivery fails permanently.



### Address not found

Your message wasn't delivered to [redacted]@ieee.org because the address couldn't be found, or is unable to receive mail.

## Investing in your own personal Email ID

Having your own website/domain on the internet and having an email address in the domain can speak loads about your professionalism.

Truth is that all of us like to be known as individuals. We all wish to be unique and want to be known for our work. Having a little corner of our own on the internet and a related personal email can help create a lasting impression about your identity.

To create such an email, you will need to first register your domain name (like aryamurali.com) and then create your email within this domain (like hello@aryamurali.com) using services such as Zoho, G-suite et al.

Zoho is actually free for use but to use Gsuite, you may have to pay a small fee of about INR 150 per month. Even though Gsuite is expensive compared to Zoho, we recommend that you use Gsuite because you get all features and functionalities included in a normal gmail account and more along with it. Access to Google Drive, spam protection, a gmail-like inbox are few of them.

How to set up your own email on Gsuite?

1. Checkout this playlist with detailed videos on setting up your own email: [G Suite Godaddy Setup - A step by step video guide](#)
2. [Godaddy Website](#)
3. [Official Gsuite website](#)

Cost estimation

#### **Cost of your Domain**

This cost varies depending on your domain name. It can be anywhere from INR 99 per year to INR 3000 per year and sometimes even more. For sake of calculating an average amount, let's take **INR 600** to be price you pay for a decent domain per year.

To know the exact amount you'll have to pay to get a domain of your choice, try searching for the domain you wish to buy [here](#).

#### **Cost of Gsuite**

Gsuite charges INR 150 per month per user. So if you use Gsuite for up to a year, then the total amount you pay per year is  $150 \times 12 = \text{INR } 1800$ .

**Total cost =  $1800 + 600 = \text{INR } 2400$  per year.**

In just under INR 2500, you can set up and run your online domain and a related professional email. Most students pay this money off using the financial rewards they get when they secure various scholarships, internships or competitions. Others take help from their parents and well-wishers until they graduate and take up a job.

The benefits that you will get by making this small investment now would be much more. You will make more than this amount you invest when your professional online identity plays a role in getting you selected for various opportunities.

Final word on this is that you should surely invest on your own website and email if you have the means to do so. It is a great addition to your armoury. If you do decide to invest on this, then do ensure that you commit towards securing a financial reward to support yourself.

## Email elements

So your email inbox has slightly more components and functionalities than just writing and sending mails or receiving them. Let's take a look at all these email elements.

### Compose

You obviously have a 'compose' functionality. This lets you draft emails and send them to people. The compose feature in itself has all these options:

#### **'To' field**

This is the field where you enter the email ids of intended recipients of your email. You may add more than one person here if your email is intended to be received by them all.

#### **'CC' field**

CC stands for Carbon Copy. Now while your email may be intended for someone, you may want to send a copy of the email to few others. This is where you should type in email ids of all people who should receive a copy of this email.

#### **'BCC' field**

BCC stands for Blind Carbon Copy. BCC works pretty much the same way as CC. It lets you send a copy of your email to all marked in the bcc field. But the only difference is that the recipients of your email (people in the 'To' and 'CC' fields) will not know that you have BCC'd someone.

Overuse of BCC field is generally not recommended. Use it only when absolutely necessary.

#### **Subject**

This is where you type in a short, meaningful text about what your email is about. Ideally, the subject should contain 6 to 8 words and be relevant to the contents of the email.

Special care needs to be taken to ensure that you do not leave the subject field blank.

#### **Body**

Body of the email is where you type in the actual matter. It is much like typing into a text box or word document. Nothing special about this space.

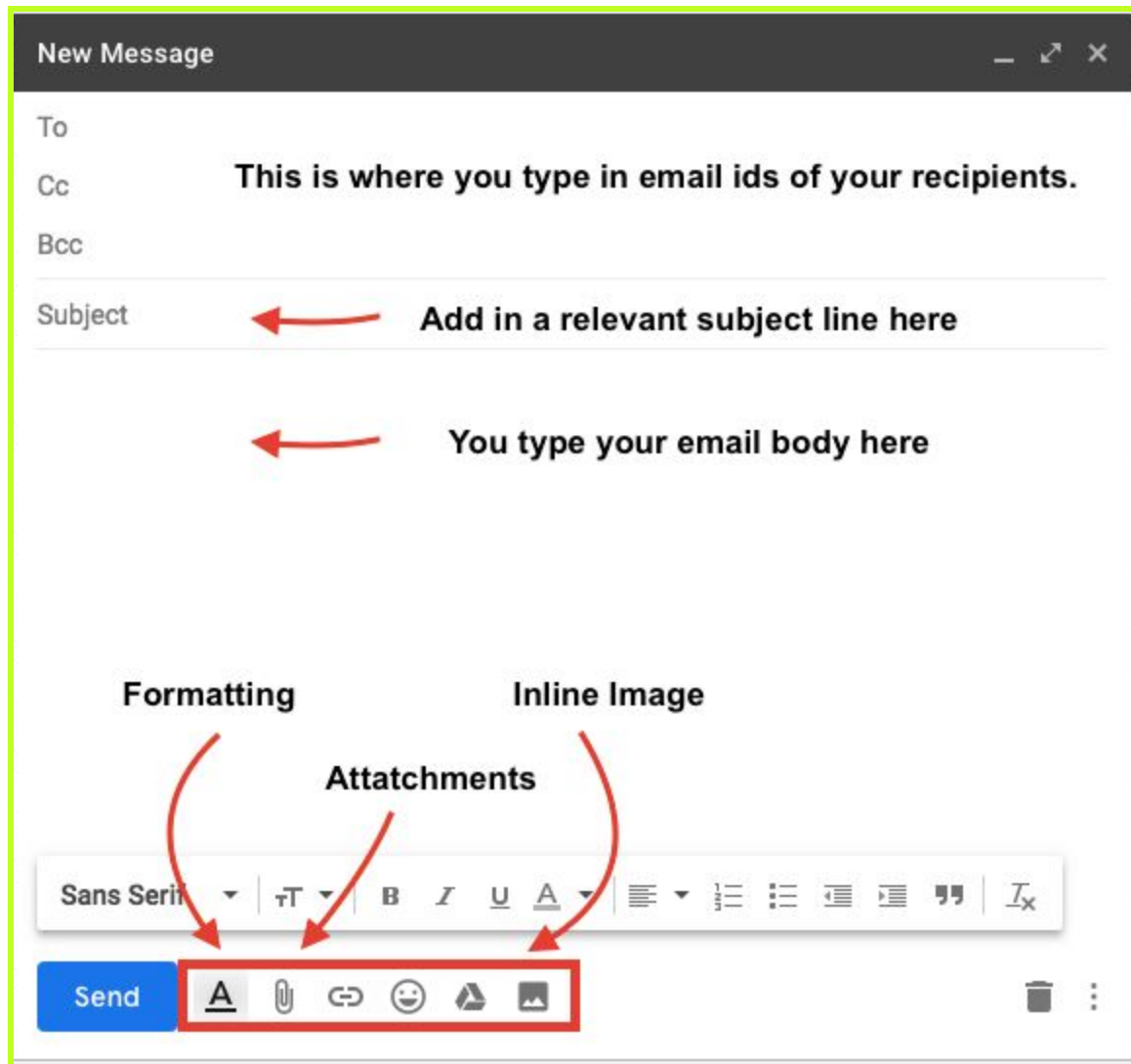
#### **Formatting**

You have few options to format your emails. This means that you can change the font, font size, colour, make it bold, italics or underline text. You can also add in quotes or use indents to make your text look readable and beautiful.

## Attachments

You have the option to attach files relevant to your email. You may either upload a file from your device or even share one directly from Google Drive.

When it comes to sharing images, you have the option to add an inline image. This means that your image will load up in between your email instead of being made available as a file that the reader can click on.



## Inbox

Your inbox is where you can view all the received emails. Gmail inbox also provides you a provision to use segments such as Primary, Promotions, Social, Forums etc within your inbox.

## Processing Emails

Upon reading the emails you get, you may decide to process them. That is take some action such as reply to the sender, forward the email to someone else, archive or delete it. There may of course be other actions such as making as important, adding a label or starring emails. Here, we'll look at few basic actions. Feel free to explore other features on your own.

**Reply**

As intuitive as this is, you reply to the sender of the email. Upon using the 'Reply' option, you *only* reply to the sender. If there are people marked in the 'cc' field of the email thread, they will *not* receive your reply.

**Reply to All**

When you use Reply to all, you send the reply to everyone involved in the email. This means that your reply will be received by all people in the 'to' and 'cc' fields.

**Forward**

This feature allows you to forward or share the email you received with other people. While forwarding, the people in the email will *not* know that you have forwarded the email to someone else unless you specifically mark them in the thread. This means that if you are forwarding an email to say, *Mr. Z*. And you want *Miss.M* to know that you have forwarded the email. Then after clicking on forward option, you have to add email id of Mr. Z in the 'To field' and mark Miss. M in 'cc' or 'bcc' to loop her in. Unless you explicitly do this, Miss. M will not know that you forwarded the email even if she was a part of the original email.

**Delete and Archive**

After reading or replying to emails, you may want to move them out of your inbox because it no longer needs your attention, right? You could delete the email if you no longer need to save it, even for future reference. But in places where you feel that you may need to refer to the email in future, but you do not want it in your inbox anymore, you can use the Archive option.

**Sent Mail**

You sent mail is where you'll find all the emails you have event sent out.

**Trash**

All emails that you delete go to the 'Trash' folder. The emails get permanently deleted from the 'Trash' folder usually after 30 days. Until then, the emails will remain in your Trash folder and in case you accidently deleted emails, you will be able to retrieve these emails from Trash within 30 days of deletion.

**Spam**

Spam refers to unsolicited or undesired email messages. Sometimes spam mail contains just promotional messages but it may also sometimes be illegal or harmful. This is why most mail service providers run a spam filter and send such potentially spam messages to your spam folder.

Sometimes, there is a slight possibility that some genuine messages might also go into the spam folder. If you were expecting an email but did not receive it yet, it might be a good idea to check the spam folder. If you feel that a genuine message was sent to spam, you may be able to mark the mail as 'not spam', post which such emails will find their way to your inbox from next time on.

Similar to Trash folder, an email in the spam folder will be automatically deleted after 30 days.

**Settings and Features**

Aside from the main email elements, there are some additional settings and features that can be helpful.

**Signature**

An email signature is a block of text appended to the end of an email message which often contains the sender's name and contact information. An email signature often contains a name, contact information, a website URL, etc.

**Filters**

Filters help you filter emails using a specific criteria. This means that you can fetch emails from a specific person, emails containing specific types of attachments or specific texts or even emails received/sent on a particular date or within a date range.

**Labels**

Labels allow you to organize your email messages into categories. They are similar to folders however, unlike folders, you can apply more than one label to a single message.

For instance, you might be getting a lot of emails from Amazon in your inbox. If you'd like to still receive them but not in your inbox, you can apply a filter and add them to a label. This way all such messages will go rest under that label without bothering you and you will also be able to easily find these emails under the label.

**Canned Responses**

Canned responses are a predefined response to a particular question. Suppose you receive a lot of emails about the same topic. Responding to them all by typing out the same content again and again is not a good use of your time. This is where you can



write one response, save it as a canned response and later use this canned response wherever you have to reply.

For instance, if you are conducting an event and you get a lot of queries about the Venue and particularly how to reach the venue. You can write a response about this and save it as a canned response. When someone writes in asking about the venue, you could just insert the canned response and reply to them.

Do remember that this is not a complete list of all the functionalities of emails. There are other useful features such as setting auto replies and keyboard shortcuts. We hope that you explore these on your own.

## Professional Email Behaviours

### **Stay on top of your email**

Being regular with checking your emails is important. Since emails are the primary means of communicating reliably with you online, almost all opportunities and organisations stick to email for their communication purposes. Checking your inbox everyday and processing the emails will help you stay on top of all the information coming in.

### **Keep your inbox clean**

Almost all social media websites require you to provide an email address for communication. Ensure that you do not use your professional email id for these websites. Not only will your inbox get cluttered, it will also increase chances of spam emails coming in to your inbox.

Maintain your professional email solely for the purpose of professional communication and use an alternate email to engage on social media and other tools.

### **Respect your Reader's time**

As you draft your emails, always keep in mind to respect your reader's time. Keep the content as crisp and relevant as possible.

Getting directly to the point of your email is not rude or unprofessional. An average working professional receives anywhere between 50 to 100 emails a day and it would greatly help them save time if you would get to the point as quickly as you can.

Include all the background information and resources that the reader might need to fully understand your email body and also respond to you in quick time.

If you are sending across a request, ensure that your request is very specific. Let's say you wish to receive some ideas on improving your application. Writing an email and asking for general feedback would make it very difficult for the person to compile information. There is lack of clarity there and also you are asking the other person to spend way too much time in figuring out what to write to you. Instead, asking for a specific request on for instance "How you can customize your resume to fit into a single page" or "How you can improve your SOP" will make it way easier for them to reply to you.

If you are requesting for a meeting, be sure to consider their preference. Maybe you want to have a physical meeting, but the other person prefers calls. Being flexible here, respecting their time and preferences and putting them first should be the way to go.

Before you ask, see if you can find the information online. This is applicable particularly when you reach out to someone with a specific request. Before you do so, do your primary research and check if they have published anything related to the matter in their blog or website. If there is information available, ensure you read it up and then email them with any other specific questions you may have.

#### **Don't use urgency.**

Write someone with an urgent only if it really is urgent. Incases where you can manage to deal with the situation, you really should and urgent requests should be saved for only critical situations. If you pose every request of yours as urgent, then chances are that the person reading your request will not consider it a priority.

#### **Avoid ASAP requests.**

If there is something you can plan for and request in advance, you should do that. Instead, sending over an email at the very last minute and asking someone for an ASAP response is not nice. You should ideally give the person 1-3 days to get back to you on your request.

### **Balance your emotions**

#### **Never respond if you are upset**

Always try and respond to emails when you are in a clear, positive state of mind. Especially when it comes to responding to negative emails. Respond only when you have the time and emotional bandwidth to process emails and think objectively. For instance, you wrote to someone about a request and they got back to you denying the request. Maybe you are upset about it. Instead of replying to the email right away, take some time to cool off. As you begin to respond, try to understand the case from their point of view and write back a balanced email.

**Don't be sarcastic or use rude jokes**

Emails are a professional medium and not a place for you to display your sense of humor or sarcasm. Try and be as sensitive as you can to different kinds of people you would be interacting with.

**Do not lash out.**

When responding to accusations or difficult emails, remember to not lash out or be hard on the other person. Understand that they may be only presenting their perspectives and politely agree or disagree with them.

**Mind your language**

Using abusive language or swear words in your emails is highly unprofessional. Strictly refrain from these.

**Double check the tone of your email**

Sometimes when you write the email, you may come across as too serious or too casual. In cases where you have certain emotions involved in the conversation, double checking on the tone of your email and what feelings it might trigger in the receiver might help you.

**Refrain from sharing confidential information over email**

The moment you share any information with someone over email, a large part of your privacy has been compromised. You will never know what they will do with the information or who they might share it with. So unless and until you really trust the person and are okay with the information being shared, it might be a good idea to refrain from sharing confidential information over email.

**Language**

When writing your emails, use a language that the person on the other end might understand. Unless you really need to use a local language and unless you are certain that the receiver would be able to understand it, it is best to stick with English.

No SMS language. In professional communication, SMS language is a big no-no.

Example: Hey, how u doin?

Refrain from typing out sentences in capital letters. Capital letters in emails resemble shouting in real life. Use of capitals may not be well received by all.

Example: PLEASE RESPOND BACK TO ME.

Spell and grammar check your emails before you send them. Using tools such as grammarly to detect such errors and even proofreading your email before you send out a good email can be a good practice.

**Don't misspell names**

It may be a typing error or you may have entirely overlooked a person's name. But whatever it is, ensure that you do not misspell people's names. It is considered very disrespectful to the person.

When in doubt, try and search for the person online and go through their LinkedIn profile to cross verify their name. You should be able to find the person's linkedin profile by searching for their name along with the name of their Organisation.

In an event where this happens by mistake, do ensure that you acknowledge the oversight on your part and apologize for it.

**Review before you send**

It is always a good practice to review your emails before sending them. A simple act such as reading through what you've written and removing any spelling/grammar mistakes should do. Do also note whether the purpose of your email has come out clearly without confusion.

Additionally checking for formatting errors might also be a good idea. Especially if you have copy pasted any parts of your email from different sources, there may be a formatting difference in your text. Ensure that the formatting is all cleared and looks alike.

**Use 'Reply to all'**

In the event of replying to an email that has multiple people involved, ensure that you use 'Reply to all'. Before you respond to such emails, take a look at the recipients of the email. If you see people in the **cc** field and if they are all supposed to be looped in on the thread, then ensure that you use 'Reply to all'.

In case you wish to pick the conversation from a main thread involving a lot of people to interacting with just a specific person, you may use Reply in place of Reply to all. But in all other cases, it should be a 'Reply to all'.

**Use neat and readable formatting**

The way you draft your email is a mark of your professionalism. Use neat formatting that makes the text more readable. Ensure that all the text in your email is of the same font and size. Do not use flashy colours or patterns. Use a readable, neat font and choose a size that's neither too large or small.

**Add a professional Signature**

It is a good practice to include a professional signature at the end of your emails. You may either just add in 'Regards' along with 'Your Name' or you may even decide to add

in the links to your website and social media profiles or your contact number and address.

Using your signature to draw attention to your work can also be a great idea.

### **Ensure your files are shared correctly**

When sharing files, ensure that you share the right files. Do also remember to name your file with something that is intuitive.

Since most of us use mobile devices to access emails, using Google Drive over Traditional file attachments may work better in terms of sharing and processing them.

In case you are sharing your files in Google Drive, ensure that you provide appropriate access to the file before sharing it.

### **Always add in a crisp, to the point 'subject' to your email**

The subject line of your email should ideally convey what the purpose of your email is in just 6 to 8 words. It is always a good practice to write a meaningful subject line as it helps the reader quickly understand what your email is about. Sending an email with a blank subject line is a negative sign and clearly is not professional email behaviour.

### **Always maintain an email trail**

It is always a good practice to maintain an email train of your interactions with people. Right before getting on a call with someone, it might good for you to send across an email briefly mentioning what you're hoping to discuss and that you're looking forward to it. Right after the call, you can quickly summarize your key takeaways. Maybe you went to this conference and met someone there. Shoot an email right away to reconnect online.

What you are essentially doing is creating a written record of the activity and also ensure that it shows up when you look for all the interactions you have had with people at a later point. Documenting interactions of email ensures that you don't miss to recall them later and is a professional way of maintaining record.

## **Writing good emails**

Writing good emails is an art. However, we do have certain guidelines that you can try adopting, in your path to becoming a master email artist.

### **Think before you write**

It is always a good practice to think about all the points you wish to address in your email before you draft the email. Let's look at some questions that can help guide your thinking.

- What is the objective of this email?
- Who all needs to receive the email?
- Is there an action I'd like the receiver to take?
- What all information will the reader need in order to take an action?
- Are there any attachments to be shared?

### **Add a short, meaningful subject line**

Once you think through the contents of your email, you should add in a short, meaningful subject line that describes what your email is about. 6 to 8 words is a good length.

### **Relevant body**

Now let's look at few points you need to remember while drafting your email.

### **Start with a greeting**

Pretty much the way you'd begin your conversation with someone offline, you begin your email conversation with a greeting such Hello Mrs.Linda, Dear Professor Gerald or Respected Ms. Smith.

### **Introduce yourself and mention how you got to know them if it's your first conversation.**

Here's there's one rule - Do not surprise your reader. Introduce yourself and tell them how you got to know about them or where you received their email from.

### **Get to the point of your email in your first two lines**

It is always a good practice to convey why you are writing the email in the first two lines of your email. This helps the reader to quickly understand the purpose of your email and save time as well.

Conversely, forcing them to read through the entire email and making it hard for them to even understand what your email is about could be a bad use of their time. This would be in direct violation of our 'Respect your Reader's time' rule.

### **Provide sufficient background information**

If your reader requires additional context or information to understand what your email is about, take time to give all those details. For instance, let's say you got selected to attend a conference but you have your exams on those same days. You want to know if your selection can be deferred to next year because you are not able to attend this time.

When writing to the conference team about your case, you should ensure that you provide them with sufficient context about why you are unable to attend this conference. Also note to provide information about your ID number, full name and other details so that they don't have to go searching for it.

Instead of providing these details, if you just end up asking them, “Hey can I defer my spot for next year?”, the team would be utterly confused about the email.

Always remember that your job is to make things easier for your reader.

### **Have a proper call to action**

Imagine receiving an email with just plain information and no suggested call to action. In our earlier example, if you send an email to the scholarship team about your exams coming in, and just ask them “What should I do?”, what you’re doing is asking them to make a decision for you.

‘What you should do’ is a choice you make - You may decide to skip the exam and attend the conference or vice versa. Let’s say you decided to skip the conference and take the exam instead. What you want to know is if there is any possibility for you to attend the conference next year based on this year’s selection.

So what you really should be writing in is “I’d have loved to attend the conference but unfortunately my exams have come in between. I cannot afford to miss my exams. So unfortunately, I may not be able to attend the conference this year. Is there a possibility that I can defer my selection this time and attend the conference next year instead?”

### **Closing**

Always have a proper closing to your email. Thanking the reader is a good idea, any day! If you are anticipating a response, you may write that you look forward to receiving a response.

Or you might just send across your regards. But whatever you choose to do, add in a proper closing.

### **Following up on Email**

So maybe the person you wrote an email to did not respond to you. What you should do now is follow-up with them by sending them a follow-up email.

When do you send your follow-up email? Or how long should you wait for a response before sending a follow-up email? Allow your reader at least **1-2 weeks** to get back to you. That’s a good time for someone to write back to you and if you don’t hear within 1-2 weeks, you can send in your follow-up email.

When you follow up on a conversation you have already had, ensure that you send the follow up email to the same old conversation thread. What this does is bring up this conversation to the top of your reader’s inbox and also provide additional context about your conversation and that you had reached out earlier.

This is not the only scenario where you follow-up. Maybe you had a great meeting with someone. You could follow-up with thanks and regards within 24 hours of the meeting.

Or maybe you are just catching up with an old connection. You can send across a follow-up email 3 months after your last interaction.

To know more about writing follow-up emails, checkout this resource by Hubspot: [On Follow up emails](#)

**Resources**

1. [On Follow up emails](#)
2. [Writing Good Emails infographic](#)
3. [Email Writing Tips](#)



## Building your Online Presence

Your online presence is powerful. It reveals a part of who you are and helps build trust and credibility.

These days, almost everyone is on the internet - most people are on facebook and twitter some on LinkedIn and few have their own personal websites. This means that to find information about someone, all we need to do is search for them on the internet. And because we share a slice of who we are on the internet, it really shapes the perception people have about us.

So what about us we put on the internet, pretty much determines the first impression that people might have. Today, job recruiters may search for you online and opportunity applications ask you to include your LinkedIn and Github profiles, your personal blog or website too. Not having an online presence is quickly turning to be a negative signal especially if your role is expected to revolve around the internet.

Given that it is easy enough to curate what we share on the internet and what about us is published, we can surely take some efforts in ensuring we have a decent to great online presence.

Let's look at few ways in which you can improve your online presence.

### LinkedIn Profile

LinkedIn is a social network for professionals. On LinkedIn, you can find new opportunities to grow your career and connect with professionals. You can showcase all your experiences, accomplishments and even get recommendations from people you have worked with.

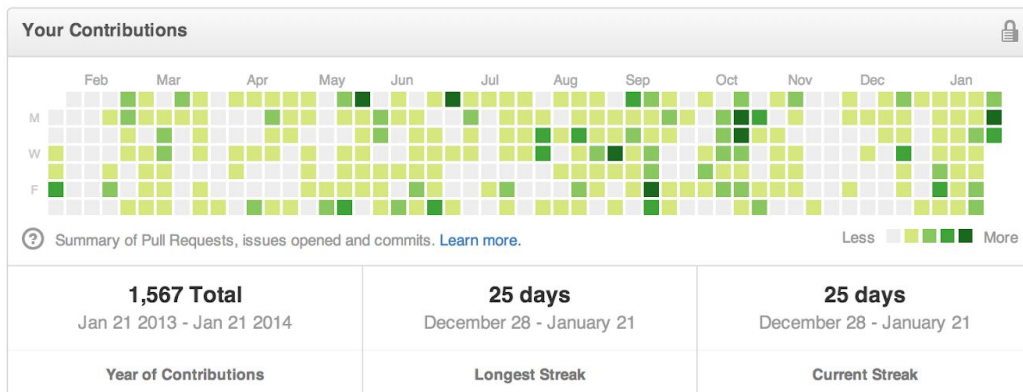
Being on LinkedIn and maintaining a good profile automatically ensures that your name comes up when searched for on Google. This in turn adds credibility to your profile and talks much about your professionalism.

### Github Profile

GitHub is a code sharing and publishing service. It is a social networking site for programmers.

Generally, contributing to open source technologies will help you improve your skills and also get noticed by people and opportunities. If you are a developer, then one of the best ways in which you can showcase your work is by maintaining an active github profile. Every time you

make a commit to Github, your activity gets marked as green. This gives people a quick overview about consistency of your work.



## Own website

Having your own website is one of the best ways to control your narrative. You decide what about you is communicated through your website and it helps you in shaping up what you wish for other people to know about you.

You may also use your website to share a snapshot of your Resume, your experience with projects, accomplishments and so on.

This website by Arvind Sanjeev is a good example to emulate: <http://arvindsanjeev.com>

He appears to have used HTML and CSS to build his own website.

If you are not quite comfortable with website development using HTML and CSS, don't worry. You have other options to quickly build your own website:

### Google sites

Google sites is inevitably one of the easiest options at your disposal to quickly create your website. It is much like dragging and dropping elements and publishing your site on to the web.

You can build your website in just under 5 minutes without writing a single line of code.

Example website: [anitagrace.in](http://anitagrace.in), [aryamurali.com](http://aryamurali.com), [Rohan Saxena](http://Rohan Saxena)

### Wordpress

Wordpress has slightly more extensive options than Google sites when it comes to themes and functionalities. The ability to code on top of what you've built using custom themes is an added plus here.

But for a quick website, you can surely use the drag and drop features and get going.

Example website: <https://thegirlwrites.in/>

### **Jekyll**

Jekyll is a simple, blog-aware, static site generator for personal, project, or organization sites.

There are a number of Jekyll themes available and you need to be comfortable with some coding to edit out your Jekyll site. But with the ability to fork a site you liked on the internet and editing it to suit your style, jekyll themes work well in quickly adopting a website you liked.

Example website: <http://jamigibbs.com/>

Github Repo: <https://github.com/jamigibbs/portfolio>

## **Blog**

Having your blog online and writing away your thoughts, experiences and learning is a great way to build an online reputation. As a student, your focus can primarily be around the projects you do and the organisations you've worked with.

Writing consistently about your work ensures that it comes up on top when people search for you. An additional benefit of this is that you'll be able to consolidate your own learning as well. Getting started with blogging is quite easy. Just decide to write and write away. Initially when you get started with writing, it is important that you write for yourself, so that you can improve upon your written communication skills. You will eventually develop a following and people will begin to appreciate your work. But you will need to consistently keep writing before you get there.

You can quickly begin blogging by using one of the following platforms:

### **Medium**

Medium is a brilliant writing tool. Their fonts and features are pretty neat. So you wouldn't have to worry much about making your blog beautiful. It is very easy to write, edit and publish on medium.

Medium itself has a lot of subscribers and readers. So there's a better chance that people will discover your blogs. Getting started is as simple as creating a profile and writing away.

### **Wordpress**

If you wish to have your own blog along with your personal website, wordpress can be a good option.

### [Google Sites](#)

Same goes for Google sites. You can quickly write and publish here. But unlike medium, there's a dearth of community around google sites. So people may not naturally discover your content unless you share it or they discover it through search.

### [Blogger](#)

Blogger also lets you quickly create your blog and start writing. It is quite similar to wordpress in this regard.

## Learning to set up online profiles and personal website

To set up your own online profiles on LinkedIn, Github, Medium and also build your own website, you might need some help. There is a lot of content online to help you learn and do these on your own.

To get started, you can probably google for "How to set up a profile on Medium". Lots of articles and youtube videos may come up. Try watching some of them and use it to try building your profile.

Likewise, google and locate information about other elements as well. Whenever you encounter a specific query, try to google for the specific question as it is. Maybe you encountered an error while publishing your google site, let's say. Then you can copy the error message and google is as it is. If you encountered the error, then chances are that others might have had the same issue as well. There are online forums such as stackoverflow where people might have already addressed these issues and by reading through such discussions, you'll get a good idea about how you can fix the issue.

## Get started Checklist

No you are all prepped up to begin applying to opportunities. But where do you begin? Let's look at a checklist of things you can try.

- Think about your goals and interests
  - Write down you goals in your journal or a document.
- Research and keep track of the opportunities that align best with your interests and goals
  - Learn to use 'Google' well in your research
  - Set Calendar reminders to help you prepare for these opportunities at least 3 weeks before the deadline
- Start building your online presence
  - Set up your blog
  - Create your Google site website
  - Set up your Linkedin profile
  - Set up your Github profile
- Decide on a project you wish to try
- Application Prep
  - Create your Resume
  - Identify recommenders who will be happy to write an LoR for you
  - If you don't think there is anyone who can recommend you, start building meaningful relationships with your professors and leaders.
- Write Shitty First Draft of answers to common essay questions

We'd love to know if you've completed any of these segments. When done, feel free to write in to us at [volunteers@rethinkfoundation.in](mailto:volunteers@rethinkfoundation.in). When you write the email remember to keep our email writing best practices in mind.

Once you tick off all items of this list, then it is about focussing on your projects and regularly blogging about your experiences.

**It is never too late to start. But it is always good to start early.**

Identifying opportunities you wish to apply well in advance and having all the basic materials prepared will save you a lot of time while applying as well.

We hope that you begin working towards your journey of applying to these amazing opportunities today. On that note, sending across more power your way!

Onwards and Upwards!

# Contributors

## About Rethink

Rethink Foundation (Rethink) is a volunteer driven knowledge platform to provide information and guidance to students about professional development opportunities.

There are a number of opportunities available to students that can positively impact their academic and professional outcomes. Unfortunately awareness of such opportunities remains low in our student fraternity and even in those instances when they are aware of such opportunities, reliable information and guidance is not always forthcoming.

We attempt to bridge this gap with our efforts with Rethink. Our model is unique in that it relies almost exclusively on digital platforms and technology infrastructure for delivery.

Our model relies on our 3 pillars: Wiki, Lives & v@r.

### [Wiki](#)

Wiki is our central repository of knowledge. Information and guidance of all our curated opportunities are published on our Wiki. Each opportunity will also have a dedicated page. All information on our Wiki is public and accessible to all.

### **Lives**

We host Live Interviews with previous recipients or beneficiaries of the opportunity. In addition to this, we also look to host Lives with representatives of the host organisations of these opportunities.

### **v@r**

The email [volunteers@rethinkfoundation.in](mailto:volunteers@rethinkfoundation.in) (v@r) is our central mechanism of offering guidance. Anyone writing in to v@r for guidance on any matter will be reliably responded to. All queries are typically responded within 24 hours.

This handbook is an extension of our effort to facilitate guidance to students on applying to various opportunities. All the information contained in this document has evolved from years of collective learning from applying to various opportunities as well as facilitating guidance to students about the same. The information contained within this document is only to be seen as our guidance and **not** as undebatable, undeniable facts.

## Contributors

### [Arya Murali](#)

Arya is the Director of Opportunity Project at Rethink. She is a beneficiary of various opportunities herself and has been facilitating guidance to students on applying to these over the course of 2 years.