

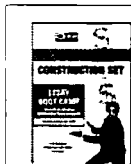
# Enhance Your Record in Key Areas

As you fill out your scholarship applications, you will inevitably notice that certain aspects of your record are not as strong or as well developed as you would like. (We all have these “trouble areas.”) You’ll also observe that for many applications you will be lacking that perfect experience, activity, or anecdote needed to answer a particular type of question.

In essence, you will want to engage yourself in a little *scholarship bodybuilding*—buffing up certain aspects of your profile, adding tone and definition to other areas, and increasing your fitness all around. You’ll then be able to flex your scholarship muscles with the best of them.

This article provides the know-how to do this by examining and enhancing your “content”: all the activities, awards, achievements, experiences, and credentials that make up the raw materials of a scholarship application. Content strategies, therefore, are the techniques we can use to improve our records in key areas, enhance our overall scholarship résumés, and thereby increase our chances of taking home the college cash.

The extent to which you can enhance your record, of course, depends upon the amount of time you have until a given scholarship application is due. If an application is due tomorrow, there’s not going to be a whole lot of content you can really



**ATTENTION STUDENTS AND PARENTS:** This article is designed to work together with Ben Kaplan's *Scholarship Starter Kit* CD. If you haven't received a CD, contact your college planner or counselor, or let us know at [www.ScholarshipCoach.com/needkit](http://www.ScholarshipCoach.com/needkit)

add. If a scholarship deadline, however, is three to six months away—or even only a few weeks away—there is a great deal you can do to beef up your record.

## Expand Upon Your Strong Points

At first glance, adding content in areas you are already good at may seem counterintuitive. If you already excel at something, why do you need to add to your record in this area?

The simple answer is that we want to take your strongest skills and transform them into truly stand-out talents—a sprucing up of your portrait that gets you noticed by application judges. Put another way, we want to add depth to the most critical areas of your record and use this depth to distinguish you from the crowd.

To illustrate this concept, I'd like to share with you a few examples from my own experience. As I described earlier, one of the areas I tried to highlight in my scholarship applications was my writing ability.

I had spent considerable time as a writer and editor on the school newspaper, so I wanted to expand

upon this strong point and add depth to my record in journalism. One way I did this was to submit a series of articles on pressing news items to various journalism competitions. Additionally, I sent off some articles to my local newspaper; I knew that getting them published in this larger, real-world venue would be an important mark of distinction.

Over time, I came up with more ways to expand my involvement in other activities that would showcase my writing skills in arenas a bit beyond my comfort zone. I approached KLCC, the National Public Radio affiliate in my hometown, with the idea of writing a series of radio commentaries on issues affecting young people. The radio station went for the concept, and in a matter of weeks I took to the airwaves.

I also approached the owners of the tennis club where I practiced with an offer to write, design, and produce the club's monthly newsletter—thereby saving them significant money on contracting out the job to a local advertising agency. This project showcased a different side of my writing and provided me with additional clips to include as supple-

mentary materials in scholarship applications.

Now don't get me wrong: I didn't pursue these activities solely because they would enhance my scholarship chances. Writing was a field I loved, and such projects were exciting opportunities to grow. Working to enhance the depth of my writing activities, however, provided the spark that motivated me to find creative ways to express and improve my writing skills.

Adopting a similar strategy will help you enhance your skills in areas that are natural extensions of your interests and passions. You will be encouraged to dream up projects that you would have never considered and to do things that you've always wanted to do, but never got around to actually doing.

### TIME JUGGLING

If you don't have much time until a bunch of applications are due, adapt this strategy to fit the time available. Perhaps this means simply joining and participating in that after-school club or college group you've been meaning to check out. Or maybe it means turning a class project into something that you can post on the Internet—informing and educating others. The possibilities are limitless.

Even if you're applying for scholarships right away, taking on longer-term projects now will still have an impact. Consider my radio commentary project as an example: For scholarship applications that came up before I had actually delivered any commentaries, I would mention that I was currently "writing a series of five on-air youth commentaries for a local National Public Radio

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affiliate." So even if you haven't had the chance to complete a substantial portion of a project, just the fact that you are pursuing it can enhance your scholarship credentials.

### Shore Up Weak Areas

In addition to developing your strong points, it's also important to come across as well rounded—thereby enhancing the breadth of your credentials.

Although your application spotlight should shine on the major themes of your scholarship application, you will want to include activities, achievements, and other credentials that demonstrate a wider range of exploration.

To implement this strategy, try to participate in activities that fill in glaring holes in your record. To help you figure out the key areas in which you most need improvement (and we all could use improvement!), think about the academic subjects, extracurricular activities, or types of experiences you consistently avoid. Then try to find relatively painless ways to fill in these résumé gaps.

For example, in my high school record, a high percentage of my most compelling achievements and experiences were clearly in fields related to the arts and humanities. To emphasize that I wasn't just a one-dimensional student who wasn't

interested in math and science, I joined my high school's science club and competed on the Science Olympics and math teams. This participation demonstrated my quantitative skills—a range of abilities that I didn't have the opportunity to exhibit in other extracurricular activities. Not only did this extra effort benefit my scholarship applications (and college applications, too), but I also improved my math and science skills on the side.

Many students discover that subjects they didn't care for in a classroom environment suddenly become fun and interesting in a more hands-on setting. So just do it: Determine the gaps in your record and find simple ways in the time available to address these weak areas.

### Create Opportunities

Some of the most rewarding experiences I had during my high school and college years were related to opportunities that I created for myself—whether it was my internship with a U.S. senator, a reporting job at the Democratic and Republican National Conventions, or starting my own Homework Helpline telephone tutoring service.

I also discovered how each opportunity I created for myself kept propelling me forward to even more exciting opportunities—in effect,

creating a chain of life-changing events.

So what if your school doesn't sponsor a program in a particular activity that interests you? Try starting up your own club. What if you need guidance in a particular activity? Find a member of your community who can show you the ropes. What if you have a particular career interest that you'd like to explore? Then create your own internship or apprenticeship.

Likewise, if you are unable to get an appointment with a certain influential person you want to speak with, don't just accept it. Instead, go to his office early in the morning, wait until he shows up, and set an appointment in person. (I've had to do this. Believe me—it works!) If you

are especially enjoying a subject in school, talk to the teacher or professor about how you can pursue it in more depth.

In general, always go out of your way to talk to those who might be able to direct you toward intriguing future projects. If you have no idea about how you might expand the breadth and depth of your record, they might have a great suggestion. They might even volunteer to be your mentor.

Remember to take advantage of all the special resources around you. If you live in a college town, look into special university programs or possible internships with professors. For those who live in more rural areas, take advantage of your proximity to things that your big-city

counterparts might not be able to readily access.

One scholarship winner I met did agricultural research on her family farm. Another winner who lived in rural Alaska used his proximity to the Exxon Valdez oil spill to study the effects of the accident on the environment.

With this type of inquisitive mindset, you will undoubtedly find an abundance of exciting possibilities awaiting you. The key is to never just wait for opportunity to knock... you do the knocking yourself!

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*The author of this article, Ben Kaplan, is the publisher of ScholarshipCoach.com and the winner of more than two dozen scholarships worth \$90,000—enough to cover virtually the entire cost of his Harvard education.*



For more scholarship awards related to your special interests, see Ben Kaplan's Scholarships That Totally Rock CD-ROM series. This series includes guides for business, law, teaching, and more. [www.ScholarshipCoach.com/products/totallyrock](http://www.ScholarshipCoach.com/products/totallyrock)

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## Enhance Your Record Idea Jogger

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This form is designed to help you brainstorm ways to enhance your record for scholarship applications. You will accomplish this by expanding upon your strong points and shoring up your weak areas.

### Strategy #1: Expand Upon Your Strong Points

▶ Identify three aspects of your activities, credentials, and record that could be your *strongest* areas (consult your *Personal Inventory Log* and *Community Service Log*):

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

▶ To expand upon your strengths in these areas, can you do any of the following:

#### IDEAS

Join a school club/group?

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Join a community group?

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Apply for a job/internship?

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IDEAS

Create your own job/internship?

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Create your own independent project?

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Start your own organization?

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Create independent study course at school?

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- ▶ Are there any individuals in your school or community who could help you implement any of the above ideas?

- ☐ Family members?
- ☐ Teachers?
- ☐ Coaches?
- ☐ Employers?

- ☐ Peers?
- ☐ Family friends?
- ☐ Fellow students?
- ☐ Counselors/advisors?

- ▶ Are there any resources available to you that are unique to your city or town (such as living in a college town or an area where a historic or headline-making event occurred)?

**Strategy #2: Shore Up Your Weak Areas**

- ▶ Identify three aspects of your activities, credentials, and record that could be your *weakest* areas:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

- ▶ To enhance your record in these areas, can you do any of the following:

IDEAS

Join a different kind of club?

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Join a new community group?

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Apply for a different job/internship?

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Create your own job/internship?

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Create your own independent project?

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Start your own organization?

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Create independent study course at school?

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