

Format Your Activities and Honors

An extracurricular activity list is one of the most telling portions of your application package—it contains a lot of information about who you are and what you have accomplished in a small amount of space. So let's create one that gets you to the winner's circle.

To create a formatted activity list, get out the *Personal Inventory Log* and *Community Service Log* that you completed in an earlier action step. We can cull essential information about your activities from these worksheets.

Then you will have a decision to make: If your chosen scholarship requires you to submit an activity list according to a rigid format—and you aren't permitted to use your own format and attach it to the official entry form—you will have to follow these strict guidelines.

On the other hand, if there is more flexibility in the submission of your activity list, you will be able to use my *Activity List Master Form*—a highly reusable activity résumé format that can be easily modified to fit virtually any scholarship application. You will find this form at the end of this article.

On this form, you will list the name of each activity, a brief description of the activity, any leadership roles you have held as part of the activity, any awards or honors related to the activity, and the hours per week you have spent on it. This isn't



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

the time to be modest: Don't be afraid to give yourself the credit you deserve.

RANKING YOUR ACTIVITIES

Here's a piece of advice from the world of real estate that actually applies to activity lists. I have three simple words for you... location, location, location. The location at the top of your activity list is the most important part. That's where you want to place the most emphasis on your most compelling credentials, activities, and achievements.

Here's why this is important: a scholarship judge has a limited amount of time to review the activities on your list. When skimming through your materials to see if you should make the first cut, he or she may not have a chance to review the activities further down on your list.

Because of this, you should rank your activities in order of importance, with the top of the list reserved for activities that you definitely want the judges to notice. Which activities deserve this preferential status? The top of your list should feature the activities that best reinforce your primary application theme and best address the judging

criteria for your chosen scholarship.

As a result, the order of the items on your activity list may vary between scholarship applications. If your primary theme and the judging criteria both emphasize community service, for instance, you will want to put service activities at the top of your list. Likewise, if your theme and the judging criteria focus on a specific career goal, you should place the activities that relate to such goals at the very top.

After dealing with the top of your list, you'll want to figure out the relative positioning of all the rest of your activities. If you have accumulated a long string of activities, you may want to group particular types of activities together to make it easier for the judges to make sense of all of the information.

FINDING THE LINGO

As you convert information from your *Personal Inventory Log* and *Community Service Log* to your activity list, you will need to transform your descriptions of each activity into what I call "résumé speak." To do this, use words that convey action, responsibility, and leadership—words like *organized*,

managed, coordinated, led, founded, recruited, initiated, achieved, spear-headed, and represented.

If there was a specific task you recorded on your *Personal Inventory Log* that is especially impressive, try to include mention of it as part of the activity description or leadership role summary.

Take a little extra time with your activity list now and it will certainly pay big dividends later.

Awards and Honors Lists

Some scholarship applications will request a list of your awards and honors. In putting together such a list, many of the same strategies used in compiling extracurricular activities apply.

Start out by using the personal inventory information you've been collecting to create a master awards and honors list. Some of these items can be culled from the awards and honors segment of your extracurricular activity list. Be aware, however, that when awards and honors are treated as a separate component, you should also include awards and honors that aren't associated with any particular activity (such as if you're selected for the honor roll or dean's list).

To rank your awards and honors, first list those that are most impressive. How do you decide what's most impressive? Just try to imagine which awards and honors your mother and grandmother would be likely to brag about to their friends. (Note: The so-called "Clean Underwear Award" doesn't count.) Typically the most prestigious awards would be ones that involve national or state recognition. Follow that up with any local or regional awards

Include details about the selectivity and significance of the award if it puts the award in a more impressive context. For instance, if your high school or college selects only one individual to receive its "outstanding student award," make the judges aware of that fact.

that are prized in your community or academic environment.

If you're short on awards that you can cite, remember that an award doesn't have to mean that you received a shiny gold-colored trophy or wood-like wall plaque. Try thinking of recognition in broader terms—such as if your fellow Investment Club members "honored" you by selecting you to be vice president.

Just being nominated for an award or scholarship can be considered an honor. Even if you didn't win a U.S. Senate Youth Program Scholarship or Harry S. Truman Scholarship, for instance, you could write that your school nominated you as a candidate for the award.

Include details about the selectivity and significance of the award if it puts the award in a more impressive context. For instance, if your high school or college selects only one individual to receive its "outstanding student award," make the judges aware of that fact.

However, if practically everyone with a pulse (and a few people without one) gets the award, keep this information to yourself. You should also add explanations for any awards and honors that will not be clearly understood from the titles alone.

Once again, when customizing this information for particular schol-

arships, take into account any packaging considerations as you decide what awards and honors to highlight. Any awards in areas dealing directly with the particular judging criteria should be placed at or near the top of your list.

If a scholarship requests both an extracurricular activity list and an awards and honors list, there are a few additional considerations. To sidestep any space limitations in the awards-and-honors section, you could include activity-related awards with your extracurricular activity list. You should avoid too much redundancy between the two lists, except in those areas that you want to stress (such as areas dealing with your theme).

Additional Materials

If a scholarship application allows you the option of sending additional supplementary materials, then do so—assuming you have something worthwhile to send.

Many students can substantially strengthen their applications by including writing samples, artwork portfolios, music recordings, and other examples of their work. This is especially useful if your application theme specifically deals with your talent in one of these areas. If you have any, you might also consider

sending news clippings about yourself (even if they are just from the school newspaper).

If you do submit something, however, make sure that whatever it is has relevance to the scholarship you're applying for and is indeed impressive. (Scholarship application judges don't need to see your baby pictures, no matter how cute or cuddly you may have been.)

Talk to your teachers, coaches, or instructors in specific areas to

help you pick which samples to include, and don't go overboard with pages of extra stuff. Instead, pick a few exemplary samples of your work. In general, refrain from including things like photocopies of award certificates. These only take up space and can annoy some judges.

Some scholarship programs—especially smaller, local ones—might not specifically state that you can submit samples of your work, but if you call and ask, they may permit

you to do so. If a scholarship form exhibits flexible rules and formatting guidelines, then it may be acceptable to include a few pages of supplementary material, even without specifically asking permission. You'll have to evaluate each situation carefully.

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 scholarships that feature lists of your activities, 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

Activity List Master Form

Activity Name and Description	Leadership Roles	Awards & Honors	Hours Per Week

Awards and Honors Master Form

Name of Award/Honor	Description of Award/Honor

Additional Materials Inventory Log™

Page: _____

Name of Application Addendum	Description	Personal Themes Reinforced