

Conduct a Personal Inventory of Your Credentials

Without keeping a written record of everything you've done, a lot of potentially good scholarship fodder can become buried a little too deeply within the gray matter of your brain. So to remember all of the details of your life—the significant events, experiences, and credentials that you should include in various scholarship applications—you will want to conduct a written personal inventory, and update it on a regular basis.

Conducting a personal inventory means taking time to reflect on your interests, achievements, and activities, as well as awards and honors. You can conduct a personal inventory most effectively by compiling a couple of written lists that span several key aspects of your record.

The first step in this process is to try to compile a list of all of the extracurricular activities, school clubs, jobs, summer camps, internships, and hobbies in which you have participated during your high school or college years—or even beyond. As you compile this list, try to include details such as any awards and honors you received from the activity, any leadership roles you assumed, and the time commitment you demonstrated.

Include in this list literally everything you have done—even activities that may have lasted for only a week-end. This includes the things you do *outside* of school-related activi-



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

ties—from piano playing and stamp collecting to break dancing and naked bungee jumping. Just because an activity isn't formalized *within* a school organization, doesn't necessarily make it any less important. Indeed, some of the most impressive types of activities that one can participate in are these individual, outside projects.

Likewise, don't forget to list any part-time or full-time jobs you have held. Listing such jobs can be especially helpful if your extracurricular involvement has been limited. Furthermore, substantial work experience, especially to save money for college, can help communicate to scholarship judges that you know the value of a dollar and actually need the scholarship funds (even when financial need isn't specifically a judging criteria).

When you record any awards and honors you have received from the activity, it's important to think of awards and honors in the broadest sense possible. Your list should include everything from that "Employee of the Month" award you received, to your election as sophomore class senator, to that time you represented your school at a special

conference on cultural diversity. And just because something isn't an official "award" doesn't mean it's not an honor.

Remember, this list is for *your* personal review only. You'll have an opportunity to select and rank your most compelling credentials when actually completing forthcoming scholarship applications.

The second step in this process is to record for each activity the top three specific tasks you performed as part of the activity. Let's say, for instance, that you are listing your participation in student government as one such activity on your list. Three specific tasks you completed as part of student government might include coordinating a school-wide food drive, organizing the Homecoming assembly, and helping allocate funds to student clubs on the budget committee.

Note that by taking the time to record the specific tasks you've completed, you will be far ahead of the game when it comes time to put together actual scholarship essays and applications. This is because you'll need to draw upon these specific examples and anecdotes to make your submissions credible and

compelling.

To take your list one step further, try to record the top three positive character qualities you've demonstrated as part of each activity. Such character qualities include hard work, communication, overcoming obstacles, teamwork, leadership, perseverance, individual initiative, passion and enthusiasm, responsibility, civic duty, and personal ethics.

So if your work on student government projects required you to rally support from faculty members, motivate other students to participate, and follow through on a series of challenging tasks, be sure to jot down communication, passion and enthusiasm, and responsibility as three character traits you've demonstrated along the way.

Recording such information is important because scholarship judges and organizations award money to people, not to résumés. By recording your demonstrated character qualities right from the start, you'll be better able to highlight them later as we complete actual scholarship applications and position you for the winner's circle.

I also want to note that because community service can be an extremely important judging criteria for some scholarships—and because you're often asked for such specialized information as how many hours you have devoted to a particular service project and the impact your service has had on the community—you should maintain a separate list just for service activities.

What's different about your community service log, however, is that you should treat it just like a time sheet—recording not just the overall activity or task, but rather every

single 15-minute chunk of time that you devote to serving others.

Why is this important? For many scholarship programs that emphasize serving the community (and other award programs such as a district honors diploma), you will need an accurate tally of the total number of hours you've devoted to service endeavors. If you've recorded this information all along, hour by hour, all you have to do is whip out your calculator, add up the hours, and you're good to go.

By the way, if you don't have much to put down on this list yet, don't get stressed. Community service is one area of your record that can generally be quickly and painlessly enhanced.

Keeping Lists Current

If you haven't been keeping a written record of your activities and credentials, it might take you a good chunk of time to get everything recorded up to the present day. You might even have to go back and add more detail as you think up activities and projects from years past.

Wouldn't it be better to keep an ongoing tally of all of your credentials that you work on weekly and always keep up to date? To do this, get in the habit of jotting down notes on your personal inventory lists on an ongoing basis.

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Did you just get home from a certain after-school activity? Take a few moments to jot down a few notes. Did you just get nominated for a certain award and honor? Be sure to add it to the activity description that you previously wrote down.

Doing this in a timely fashion is especially important because when the activity is still fresh in your mind, your descriptions of the activity are likely to be much more detailed.

Furthermore, if you are recording activities on your log but having trouble brainstorming specific tasks you've undertaken or character qualities you've demonstrated, you will know that you need to be on the lookout for such details during future participation in the activity.

This might just be the kickstart you need to improve the depth of your participation in the activity—thereby improving the anecdotes and examples you have at your disposal for future scholarship applications.

Remember, lists of activities and credentials are a mainstay of many scholarship applications. By keeping these detailed activity logs, you will have the edge on your competitors.

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.

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Community Service Log™

Page: _____

Date	Service Description	Organization Affiliation	Impact	No. of Hours
Total Hours:				