# Create a Priority
# Scholarship Calendar

How many of you are guilty of the following? You need to find that absolutely critical sheet of paper, that utterly important binder, or that badly needed notebook containing the handwritten phone number of that hottie in your Biology class... so you start tearing through the piles of clothing and other items that litter your floor. Yeah, I've been there, too.

But when it comes to embarking on a major scholarship campaign, this organizational approach will create a lot of extra work for you in the long run. So instead, let's get organized from the beginning.

In my opinion, the most important aspect of getting organized for scholarship success is creating a priority scholarship calendar. The key word here is "priority": Because there are only 24 hours in each day, you won't be able to simultaneously apply for every scholarship.

Prioritizing helps you determine where you need to spend your time and which scholarship applications you should tackle first. Instead of merely completing the scholarship application that has the nearest deadline, prioritization helps you think strategically about which applications should get the bulk of your immediate and future attention.

To begin prioritizing, you need to start off by making a list of your top 25 scholarship leads. Why do I ask for 25 different awards? Apply-

ing for scholarships is partially a numbers game: To leverage your chances of winning, you need to apply for as many scholarships as you can.

I recommend applying for at least one dozen scholarships—hopefully more than two dozen if you're up for the challenge. Many students I've coached have even completed their first 25 applications and then eagerly moved right along to the next 25!

After you've determined your top 25, narrow down this list to your top 10 opportunities—the scholarships that are the highest on your priority list. Here are the four factors that you should consider in picking your top 10:

- **Personal Fit:** Does the award seem to match your interests and credentials?

- **Potential for Recycling:** Will you be able to re-use parts of the written application for other upcoming scholarships?

- **Time to Deadline:** Is the deadline neither too soon nor too distant?

- **Money vs. Competitiveness:** How large are the potential winnings compared to the number of students who will likely apply?

To help you with this evaluation process, I've attached to this article my *Top Scholarship Identification Form*. On this form, you will score each of your top 25 award opportunities according to the criteria mentioned above.

Then it's time to take things one step further: Scanning your top ten awards, select just one scholarship to be your number one priority—the focus of your efforts for the next few days or weeks.

As you make this ultimate choice, place special emphasis on *potential for recycling*. It's especially important that the first scholarship application you complete is one that you will be able to repeatedly reuse and adapt for future contests. By choosing such a scholarship, you will be starting to create a suite of generic reusable material that you can redeploy as needed.

By compiling such reusable material, you will be able to spend *less* time in the future just complet-

ing application requirements and *more* time fine-tuning and customizing the material you've already created.

So how can you tell if certain application components can be recycled? If a scholarship application asks for generic letters of recommendation (rather than ones that address very specific questions), this is a plus. If the application requests a generic list of your activities rather than a highly customized list, this is good, too.

As for essays, if it's an essay topic that involves your future college and career goals, or a significant experience you've had in your life, all the better—these are perennial essay topics that you will be asked to write about again and again.

## Calendar Your Deadlines

Starting with the top 10 opportunities you identified—then adding the other awards on your top 25 list—calendar the application deadlines of each. To help you do this, I've attached a *Scholarship Calendar Planning Worksheet* to this article.

Note that I've included a space on the form to record a rating for the amount of *new work* (material that you can't recycle from other applications) that you will have to complete. I suggest using a 1 to 5 rating scale (with 1 indicating that you have little work to do, and 5 indicating a very high workload).

You will also notice a space on this worksheet for an "Application Start Date"—the date that you want to begin work on the written application. I've found that calendaring a date to begin drafting the application is critical in helping me complete all of the necessary tasks on time and at

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a high level of competence.

Here is another place where prioritization comes into play: The higher a scholarship is on your priority list, the earlier your application start date should proceed the actual deadline. You might, for instance, give yourself twice as long to complete scholarships in your top 10 (and even longer for your number one scholarship opportunity) compared to other scholarships with a similar workload.

Furthermore, if you notice that a scholarship on your priority list has a similar deadline to another scholarship, you will need to plan your schedule so that the priority scholarship gets the vast majority of your attention.

To assist you in managing the entire application creation process, I have also attached to this article an *Application Task Breakdown Worksheet*. This form will help you determine how much time you need for each scholarship application by providing a place to sketch out the research, draft creation, revision, and final packaging phases for each application.

By breaking down upcoming scholarship applications into a series of mini-deadlines, this form helps you budget the appropriate amount of time for each application and manage the process from an organizational and logistical perspective.

This may sound like a little bit

of busy work now, but I can't stress enough how much time and energy some advance planning can save in the long run.

Calendaring deadlines and breaking down tasks in this way has another important advantage: It allows you to look ahead to future scholarship deadlines and try to bridge multiple applications with every sentence you write, list you complete, and form you create.

Survey the landscape of upcoming scholarships on your priority list, and isolate common questions and requirements (whether it is a similar essay, worksheet, or form). As you begin the application creation process, attempt to create materials that satisfy the requirements of multiple programs in one shot.

In my own scholarship quest, I was asked by one scholarship to propose a solution to a pressing societal problem. But because I had created a priority scholarship calendar, I noticed that another application months down the road asked me to discuss ways to improve America's education system. I ended up picking "education" as my chosen societal problem for the first program. The result: Another $11,000 prize in my scholarship bank.

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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.*

# Top Scholarship Identification Form

This form is designed to help you determine your personal top ten scholarship opportunities and the single scholarship award program that will become your number one priority in the days ahead.

## INSTRUCTIONS

**Step I:** In the table on the next page, list the top 25 scholarship programs that you are eligible to apply for, as determined by your prior scholarship research during previous action steps.

**Step 2:** In the columns to the right of those spaces, you will notice four criteria, plus a space for a point total. These are parameters created to help you determine which scholarships are best for you at this time. On a scale of 1 to 5, (with 5 being the best, or most ideal), rate each scholarship by writing a score in each column. Each of the column headers are described below.

- **Personal Fit:** Whether or not this scholarship is a good fit for your needs, interests, and abilities.

- **Potential for Recycling:** Will the components necessary for this scholarship be usable in the future for other contests?  Or are they too narrow to apply to more than one award?

- **Time to Deadline:** Ideal scholarships have deadlines that fall neither too soon nor too far into the future. Ideally, the scholarships on your radar screen should have deadlines occurring in the next one to three months.

- **Money vs. Competitiveness:** Before applying for a scholarship, you must decide if it is really "worth" your time. Do this by considering weighing how lucrative the award might be against how competitive it is. For example, does it offer significant monetary rewards, but is also a very popular national competition?  Is it a small, local scholarship that others are unlikely to apply for, but only awards $50?  An ideal situation would be that a scholarship program might award a large sum but is unlikely to draw many applicants.

**Total:** For each scholarship you list on the next page, add each of the four values you recorded in the columns. Record your score in the "total" column. The highest point values (with 20 being the maximum) are indicative of the best overall scholarships for you.

## SCORING YOUR SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

| | Personal Fit | Potential for Recycling | Time to Deadline | Money vs. Competition | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | | | | | |
| 2. | | | | | |
| 3. | | | | | |
| 4. | | | | | |
| 5. | | | | | |
| 6. | | | | | |
| 7. | | | | | |
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| 21. | | | | | |
| 22. | | | | | |
| 23. | | | | | |
| 24. | | | | | |
| 25. | | | | | |

## RANKING THE BEST

According to the points you just tallied in the "Total" column on the prior page, list below the 10 scholarships with the highest scores:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Identify your number one top scholarship opportunity from this list. It should be a scholarship that includes an essay, recommendation letters, and activity lists (if it requires an awards and honors list or the submission of additional materials, that's a big plus). It also should be a scholarship that has a high potential for recycling, so that we can re-use a good portion of the work on other applications.

### My Number One Scholarship Lead:

# Scholarship Calendar Planning Worksheet

| Scholarship Name | Deadline | To-Do | New Work Rating | Application Start Date |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
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# Application Task Breakdown Worksheet

Each time you select a scholarship application to complete, it is important to be mindful of your deadline. This sheet is designed to help you identify the various tasks you'll need to complete, as well as keep track of the "mini-deadlines" by which you should have these tasks finished.

**Scholarship Name:**

**Final Application Deadline:**

## I. RESEARCH PHASE:

Engaging in research about a particular scholarship may include acquiring forms and literature from the organization, investigating the judging criteria of the program, and seeking out sample winning entries.

Deadline:

Mini Deadlines:

Task A: _____    ❏ _____

B: _____    ❏ _____

C: _____    ❏ _____

D: _____    ❏ _____

## II. DRAFT CREATION PHASE:

For a given application, you may have to complete several drafts of various documents such as essays, activity lists, and awards & honors lists.

Deadline:

Mini Deadlines:

Task A: _____    ❏ _____

B: _____    ❏ _____

C: _____    ❏ _____

D: _____    ❏ _____

## III. REVISION PHASE

Use this space to record tasks you'll need to perform in order to hone your entry, such as revising essay drafts and gathering feedback from others.

Deadline:

Mini Deadlines:

Task A: _____     ❏ _____

B: _____     ❏ _____

C: _____     ❏ _____

D: _____     ❏ _____

## IV. FINAL PACKAGING PHASE

Before you can send in your application, you'll need some time to tie up loose ends, such as assembling your materials, completing various forms, and assessing shipping methods and costs.

Deadline:

Mini Deadlines:

Task A: _____     ❏ _____

B: _____     ❏ _____

C: _____     ❏ _____

D: _____     ❏ _____