Four Keys to Scholarship Success:

1. **Academics** – GPA is very important. However, low grades do not rule out a scholarship, if you have a good essay, etc.

2. **Community Service, Volunteer Work, & Extracurricular Activities:**
   - **Leadership & Mentoring!** – Scholarship committees like to see students who are developing their leadership skills, and they love to see students who are helping the next generation to succeed. Being a peer mentor, a cadet at the middle school, volunteering with S.T.A.R.S., volunteering at the Boys & Girls Club, all of these mentoring activities will give you a huge advantage when you apply for scholarships. Find a way to show leadership that will transform your community and help others. Even a small thing like visiting people in a nursing home will make a difference (both for the people you visit, and helping you win scholarships).
   - **Community Service** – Doing volunteer work in the community is great; it will help you win a lot more scholarship money. Examples of community service are: church youth group and mission trips, Red Cross blood drives, raising money for Hurricane Katrina relief, etc. However, the best kind of community service is volunteer work that uses leadership or involves mentoring younger students. These two kinds are so important that I’ve list them as a separate category, but it’s really just a special kind of community service.
   - **Extracurricular Activities** – Getting involved in school clubs, playing sports, working a part-time job, etc., these are all good leadership opportunities. It’s not a bad idea to get involved in a few school clubs like Honor Society, Sparrow Club, Multicultural Club, Cheerleading, Cross-Country, etc. But it’s important to remember that your grades are more important, so don’t get carried away. Also, unless you’re an officer in a club, you should realize that this won’t help nearly as much as mentoring would.
   The important thing to remember is that just doing 2 hours of community service per week is enough to count. That will make a big difference on your scholarship applications.

3. **Letters of Recommendation** – You should be thinking ahead. Who are you going to ask for a letter of recommendation? This is important because many scholarships ask for 1 or 2 letters of reference. These can be from teachers, your boss at work, or the youth group leader at your church.
   So, it’s a good idea to pick a teacher or two that you like. Work really hard in their classes. Do your best to really impress them.

4. **Scholarship Essay Writing** –
   The essay is probably the most important part of the scholarship application. However, the other three parts are the foundation. If you have a 1.5 GPA and no community service or leadership/mentoring, then the best essay in the world won’t win you more than $500 in scholarships. But if you have all three down solid, then you have the perfect foundation for winning tens of thousands of dollars in scholarships, if you write your essay well.
WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF A WINNING SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY?

The essay should tell a story of the student's family and/or a life experience. It should paint a picture of the student as person. The essay should show what has made the student into the person he or she is today. *Spend quality time writing the introduction, creating a simple opening sentence that is an attention getter and captivating the interest of the reader to continue the essay. It must be unique and stand out from the rest of the essays, painting a real life scene.*

The student needs to describe the family's educational background. Was a family member an inspiration and role model? Scholarship committees notice statements like, "I am the first in my family to graduate from high school and go to college," or "I am from a single parent home."

In the essay, the student should describe struggles, hardships, and the character qualities learned through difficulties. The student needs to describe how these struggles, hardships, and challenging obstacles have made the student into the person he or she is today.

Many times students will tell sad stories, but not tell the result. What was learned from these struggles, hardships, and challenging obstacles? A tear jerking essay is not necessarily a winning scholarship essay. An essay has to show how the struggles have built specific character qualities which are now making a difference for the student and the relationships with other people.

It is not just a sad sob story—"Feel sorry for me!" It is an essay that shows victory. You are not the victim, but the victor! "Because of the circumstances, events or experiences in my life, I am better, stronger, and more determined in the direction, purpose, and plan for my life."

Describe a specific example or story of how certain events have changed the student into the person he or she is today. Not everyone has a tragedy to share in an essay. Great winning scholarship essays can be written about experiences in community service, a missions trip, a vacation, living in another country, or experiences with a person who was an inspiration.

The following elements need to be covered: The student should describe the most challenging obstacle faced and how it was overcome. What made the effort successful? How did it change the student's life? How has this obstacle made the student stronger and/or better? What character qualities and traits were learned? What character qualities make the student stand out from other people?

Describe the contributions the student has made serving in community service. How has it made the student a better person? What impact did the student make on the community? What did the student learn about life and other people?
WHAT ARE SOME TIPS TO FORMATTING, EDITING, AND WRITING A SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY?

- The student starts with the essay pre-write, Brainstorming Using Linking, using the questions from Essay for Scholarship Applications as a guide to complete this form.

- Using the essay pre-write, Brainstorming Using Linking, as a guide the student then writes the first rough draft of the essay using the Writing the Winning Scholarship Essay form.

- Next, the essay should be typed and double-spaced on a computer word processing program so corrections and changes can easily be made. Save on a computer disk.

- The essay is then revised, edited, and re-written. Spelling, sentence structure, and punctuation should be checked carefully. The essay should then be reviewed and evaluated by someone else.

- The original essay and each revision are saved and each one is given a new file name. The essay should be set aside for a week or so, then revised, edited, and re-written again.

- The final essay should be saved and be no more than one double-spaced typed page. The margins can be formatted to accommodate the essay to one double-spaced typed page.

WHAT CATCHES THE INTEREST OF THE SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE?

- The scholarship selection committee must read the essay and see a difference. It must stand out among many, many essays! It can tell a story of a truly deserving young person who wants to do something no one in his family has ever done before, and without that scholarship his dreams will never come true.

- Another powerful essay could be about a student who has dedicated many hours making a difference serving others in community service, has excelled academically or who has demonstrated leadership. Scholarship committees want to select students who have taken leadership roles in their community, school, sports, clubs, church, government, and civic organizations.

- A winning scholarship essay is not boring! The essay must have color, details, be personal, tell of actual experiences or stories, be well written, and free from grammatical errors. Scholarship committees have many applications from students who have similar GPA’s, test scores and awards, and often the essay becomes the deciding factor!

- Again, it could be the essay that determines one student’s selection over all the others. Often, a student with a lower GPA or test score is selected for a scholarship because an outstanding essay made the difference!
Scholarships Facts:

Q: How many hours do you have to work (at minimum wage) to earn $5,000?
A: About 1,000 hours (after taxes are deducted).

Q: How many weeks is that, if you’re working full-time (40 hrs / week)?
A: 1000 hrs / 40/wk = 25 weeks = 6 months

So, why would anyone work full time for 6 months (or more) to save up money for college, when they could be applying for scholarships instead.

Q: How many hours should you spend writing your scholarship essays?
A: Decide how much your time is worth. If it takes you 10 hours to write a really great essay, that means that if you win $5,000 in scholarships, it’s as if you’re getting paid $500 per hour to write your essay.

Is that worth your time? You decide for yourself. Instead, you could spend 100 hours working for minimum wage to earn as much money as you’d get from one hour of essay writing ($500/hr compared to ~$5/hr after taxes).

The truth is, the more time you spend on your essays, the better they’ll be. And the better the essay is, the more money you’ll receive in scholarship awards.