

Grammar

Grammar is a broad subject, so covering every aspect of it here is virtually impossible. Here is a list of the grammatical areas that are most likely to give your essay some trouble:

- **Parallel Structure:** Make sure all verbs in a sentence are in the same tense. If you begin with past ("served"), use it throughout. Same with past-progressive ("was serving"), present ("serve") or present progressive ("am serving").
- **Subject-verb Agreement:** A single subject must have verb that is conjugated in the singular ("A person must serve his or her community"). Often, this is messed up when using third-person and pronouns ("One must serve their community" ← "one" is singular, "their" is plural).
- **Commas:** The uses of commas are vast and often quite particular. Purdue University has a fantastic page [you can check out here](#). In general, do not use commas where your mind simply decides to take a break, but where the rules of grammar say you should. Get help from a friend, teacher, or family member determining if you have used commas properly.

Spelling

While your proofreading will likely (and hopefully) catch any casual misspellings in your essay and application, there are a couple of areas you need to double-check that your spelling is spot-on:

- **Scholarship Sponsor Names:** Do your research! Make sure any college, organization, or company names are spelled correctly. This includes properly capitalizing words that aren't normally capitalized, but due to their use in a proper noun, get special treatment. Sponsors want to know that you actually care about them and their mission enough to get their name(s) right!
- **Scholarship Sponsor Members:** Are any persons named in the prompt? Someone to whom you mail the application? Does the scholarship honor a deceased person? You'd be wise to study up and get these names right. It doesn't matter how good your essay is – if you misspell the name of a beloved dead person, you're not winning the award!
- **Content-Area Jargon:** In other words, big vocabulary words. Most niche scholarships, like those awarded by religious, career-based, military, medical, or veteran groups, all have specific terms that they value and want you to value, too. Have you brushed up on your vocabulary in these areas? Make sure someone with a similar background to the scholarship sponsor reads your essay and helps you spell all of these odds-and-ends correctly.
- **Homophones:** You know all about these after 12 years of writing in school. Here's a list of common homophones that will get a sideways frown from readers who will definitely catch any mistakes:
 - There, Their, They're – "they're" is "they are"!
 - Its, It's – "its" is a possessive pronoun, and "it's" is a contraction for "it is"
 - Your, You're – "you're" is a contraction for "you are"
 - Were, We're – "we're" means "we are"
 - Two, To, Too – "too" means "excessive" or "as well"
 - Affect vs. Effect – "affect" is a verb, as in "to affect the outcome;" "effect" is a noun, as in what one gets as the result of someone "affecting" something: "suffering the effects of tragedy...."
 - Are, Our – the first is a linking verb, the second is a possessive pronoun
 - Whose, Who's – "whose" is a possessive pronoun, while "who's" is a contraction: "who is"
 - Add, Ad – the first is a verb for addition, the second is short for "advertisement"

This is just the start of a long list of common homophones that can get you into trouble. Be sure to have someone carefully read your essay and check it for these common and easy-to-miss mistakes!

