

# Supplemental Grants

## Writing Your Application Essay



Community college, though less expensive than a four-year school, can put a tremendous financial strain on students, particularly those students who have to take time away from their jobs to devote to their studies. Fortunately, many colleges offer assistance in the form of financial aid and grants. At Patrick Henry Community College, students who have joined Student Support Services can apply for a supplemental grant.

To be eligible to receive that grant, however, you are required to write an essay to turn in with your application. There are many factors to consider when writing the essay.

## Organizing Your Essay

The grant request essay is an important part of qualifying you for the supplemental grant. Because Student Support Services has limited funds available, not every qualified student will receive grant money. Sometimes the decision comes down to specific financial situations, and how well you present your specific circumstances can make a big difference in deciding whether you are awarded the grant.

The organization of your essay should ideally include three things:

- A brief introduction of yourself, your academic goals, and where you currently stand in reaching those goals.
- A detailed description about the financial difficulties that are preventing or hindering you from achieving your academic goals.
- A detailed description of exactly how you will put the grant money to use in overcoming those difficulties.

The most important thing to keep in mind is that your essay needs to be *short* but *substantial*. It should not go on for pages and pages (1-2 pages is usually a sufficient length), but it needs to include all relevant details. The length of your essay will not make nearly as much of an impression as the *content* will; it is more important for you to be concise and specific than to explain every proverbial ounce of back-story. In other words, your essay *does* need to be detailed, but you need to make sure you're including the *right* details – not just arbitrarily giving as many details as possible.

## Describing Your Academic Goals

The first part of your essay should be a description of your academic goals – what you hope to achieve at Patrick Henry Community College and beyond. You don't need a long or elaborate description here; all you really need is a one-sentence introduction of yourself, then three to four sentences describing what you hope to accomplish with your education and where you currently stand in the process of achieving those goals.

This should serve as the introduction to your essay, and you should avoid overthinking it. Remember, the description of your academic goals should *not* be the focal point of your essay. The focal point should be your financial situation.

### Describing Your Financial Situation

A common mistake students make when they apply for the supplemental grant is making their financial situations sound as bleak as possible, thinking it will gain them greater consideration. The supplemental grant is awarded based on financial need, but it is *centered* on education. The best essays will be detached and focused. When you describe your financial situation, be as precise and specific as possible. Some students apply for the grant because of specific events, such as unforeseen medical expenses. Be straightforward in describing them:

I have struggled to meet my expenses this semester because I had to put \$600 towards repairing my car.

Others apply because of general financial hardship. If that is the case, explain – in detail – some of the factors contributing to that financial hardship:

I am currently unable to work due to being in school full-time. My bills total roughly \$700 per month, which is difficult to meet, considering I am unemployed and have other school-related expenses in addition.

Whatever your reasons for applying, be as specific as possible. The best way to do that is by approaching it as a dovetail from your introduction – you’ve described your academic goals; now describe how your finances are preventing you from meeting those goals. For the examples above, go a step further than just describing the problem in general, and go into how it affects you academically. For a specific example like a car repair bill, you might say something like this:

The \$600 repair bill for my car was not an expense I could defer, because my car is my only means of transportation to and from school.

Or, if your financial hardship is more general in nature, you could say something like this:

Because my husband is the only member of our household currently employed, we are struggling to keep our Internet bill up to date, which I need in order to complete assignments for my online classes.

### Describing How the Grant Would Help

Of greatest concern to Student Support Services is knowing the grant will be put to appropriate use. You need to be able to outline a specific plan for how the money will be used; for all of the specifics you mentioned in describing your financial situation, describe how the grant money would be used to alleviate those obstacles. Try to relate everything to your academic experience – even things you might not think are related directly to your schooling. Most average living expenses can be connected to your schooling in some meaningful way;

you need food, for instance, to stay healthy enough to concentrate in class. You need electricity at home so that you can work on your schoolwork. Explain how the grant will *help you succeed*, not just fill a need.

If I am awarded this grant, it will fill the \$600 gap that my car repairs left me with, so I will have transportation to and from school while still being able to keep my electrical bill up to date at home so I can complete my assignments.

Don't be afraid to include specific dollar amounts. If you're receiving financial aid through Pell grants or other sources, explain how they fall short of meeting your needs. That's the best way to think about the grant request, because it frames the grant as an investment rather than an expense. It simplifies the essay when you break it down into those three simple questions: What are your academic goals? How are your finances holding you back? How would the grant help you overcome those obstacles? The important thing is to give all of the important details without giving a life story.

## Preparing Your Essay

The content of your essay is the most important part, but there are also a few technical things you should keep in mind too. When you're preparing your paper, remember these things:

- You need to put your name on your paper.
  - Even though your paper is turned in with your application, they may get separated during processing. The best thing to do is put your name, the date, and "Student Support Services" on three lines at the top left corner of the first page.
- Your paper needs a title.
  - Center the title above your text, and don't overthink it; your title could be something as simple as "Supplemental Grant Essay." The reason you include a title is so you (and others) can tell at a glance what the paper is.
- Your paper is an *essay*, not a letter.
  - You should *not* use second-person ("you" or "your") when writing it, and you *don't* need a salutation or signature. Treat the grant essay as you would treat any essay assignment in an English class.
- You need to take your essay to the Writing Center or submit it to Pearson Smarthinking.
  - Student Support Services requires that all grant requests be checked and signed by the Writing Center. Remember to plan ahead so you're not having to compete with a crowd of students who have waited until the last minute, and to save even more time, check your paper for mistakes before bringing it to the Writing Center.
  - Alternatively, you can submit your paper online to Smarthinking for review.
    - If you submit your paper to Smarthinking, be sure to allow a 24-48 hour turnaround.