



Seminary Hacks

WRITING FOR ACADEMIC PRIZES

PURPOSE

The purpose of this presentation is to streamline the process of writing the application so that a student can feel confident that all components are in the best shape possible. In addition, we'll review the variety of awards and competitions available at LTS.



LTS AWARDS AND PRIZES

All LTS awards and prizes for Commencement are listed and described on the following website:

<https://lancasterseminary.edu/current-students/annual-academic-awards/>

The **deadline** for submission of an entry this year is **March 10, 2017**.

Instructions and stipulations for entries are found at the following address: <https://lancasterseminary.edu/current-students/annual-academic-awards/call-for-entries>



PREPARATION

All educational institutions that have reached a level of excellence and venerable age offer numerous prizes to their academic students who distinguish themselves as writers and achievers. Some, like Lancaster Theological Seminary, have collected an impressive array of prizes from a range of denominations, foundations, trusts, and individuals. Ranging from small to large monetary amounts, these prizes are important additions to the professional resume of LTS graduates. Unfortunately, in the recent past, a surprising number of these awards and prizes have not been granted for the simple reason that no one applied for them.

Successful writers for academic prizes follow a plan of attack that consists of several crucial elements: Thorough research of the prize, its purpose, and the sponsoring institution or individual; designating ample time to draft, revise, and edit the essay/sermon and application; and developing an effective and efficient cover letter and/or email to the contest coordinator.



PROCESS

Step 1: Research the granting institution, person, or foundation.

All contests are sponsored by groups with distinct core values that are hallmarked in the published materials as the mission statement, the strategic plan, and the profile. These values should be contained and illustrated within all components of the application. All applicants should be aware of the overall history and vision of the institution or individual and be able to address or at least nod to the impact of that vision. In addition, oftentimes the contests with website connections may have a profile or article on a previous recipient, sometimes with the winning essay. The time spent accessing these elements will enable to focus the full package properly.



PROCESS

Step 2: Allocate the proper time to draft, revise and edit the essay/sermon/response (if required).

At least one week prior to the deadline for entry, a serious contestant should compose the first draft of the written component. Brainstorm or web the most important points that should be emphasized.

In the **draft** mode, develop a strong thesis statement that conveys the most sincere and dynamic voice and commitment possible. Avoid the commonplace and the banal, but don't stun or shock. Conclude, don't summarize or state the obvious 'I want to win' sentiment. Good entries show a concrete benefit to a larger group beyond the individual. Good entries also are scrupulously honest and straight-forward without pandering.



PROCESS: STEP 2

In the **revision** mode, read the essay as if you were a part of the selection committee. (The committee does just that, read silently and aloud.) Eliminate choppy sentences, lists in sentence form, over-explanations and confessional anecdotes, linking and intransitive verbs, and lackluster diction. Ascertain that the essay 'sounds' like you in a formal and professional sense. A good revision will sharpen the main points so that they are memorable as statements, not just of information, but as illustrated values in action. Use as many senses as possible for impact.

In the final draft mode, make sure the font is Times Roman or Ariel and the size is 12 point centered, and the text printed on standard white stock. Again read the draft, this time aloud, listening for rough spots in the flow of ideas and language. Again check for 'voice'.

Of absolute importance is keeping within the designated word limit.



PROCESS

Step 3: Writing the cover letter or email.

Several elements to remember in writing a cover letter or email are the following:

- * This is the initial contact a contestant has with the selection committee; the correspondence should be very professional and concise
- * The compliments to the institution or individual and salutations should be formal
- * The primary use for the award or prize should be at least alluded to if not explicitly stated
- * The letter should be a maximum of one page
- * The first paragraph should set your identity in the context relevant to the award and succinctly state why you are writing



PROCESS: STEP 3

- * Paragraphs 2-3 should establish precisely your qualifications and status as a applicant/contestant; if a resume is included, make sure this information supplements rather than repeats
- * Make sure that the use of the award and consequences of that use are referenced
- * The last paragraph should include any additional information about contacts; sincere thanks for consideration should be included.



SOURCES:

- Ray, Katie Wood. *Wondrous Words: Writers and Writing in the Elementary Classroom*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1999.
- Strong, William. *Coaching Writing: The Power of Guided Practice*. Portsmouth, N.H Heinemann, 2001
- Strunk, William, and White, E. B. *The Elements of Style* (4th Edition). Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000.
- Zinsser, William. (2001). *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Non-Fiction*. (6th edition). New York: Harper-Collins, 2001.

