



Helpful Hints for oSTEM Scholarship Applications 2026.

Half the battle of applying for scholarships is understanding what reviewers are looking for. Start by reviewing our [evaluation criteria](#) and [FAQ](#) pages – they'll help you build a strong foundation for your application.

Regardless of where you are in your STEM journey, writing applications can be a difficult process. The guide below offers informal advice and examples to help you craft clear, authentic, and memorable responses.

Personal Statements & Short Answers

Personal information

To reduce bias in our review process, please do not include names or institutional identifiers in your application materials. Please do NOT include your name, professor's name, or mentor's name in your personal statements for oSTEM applications. We also ask that you do NOT include your institution's name in your short answers or personal statements. You can still describe accomplishments and prestige – just frame them without proper names.

To describe prestige / competitive accomplishments please refer to the below examples.

Examples:

I placed first in the regional science fair, out of nearly 1000 students.

I applied for a prestigious internship and spent 8 weeks working for a major pharmaceutical company learning a lot of cool things.

Tone

Personal statements should sound like *you*. They're not research papers or grant proposals. Let your thoughts, feelings, and personality come through.

Tip: Start by "writing how you talk" for the first draft to let your voice come through. A conversational first draft helps your authentic voice shine through – much like how you'd speak in an interview.

Flow & Strategy

The oSTEM scholarship application has several short answer questions. These questions cover a lot of the experiences that you would typically write about in a formal personal statement. We recognize that this can make it tricky, or make it feel repetitive. However, emphasizing similar traits with different anecdotes/experiences can make a point very memorable.

A reviewer likely has several applications, so focus on 1-2 traits or ideas you want the reviewer to remember about you, and really drive those home!



Some examples:

Applicant One writes about their resilience by discussing a moment where they stood up for themselves in one of the short answers. In the personal statement, they talk about a time they overcame a major setback at work. They further discussed how this challenge built their confidence, leading them to go back to school. The reviewer remembers how **resilient** and adaptable they are.

Applicant Two discusses a little bit about how optimistic they are in their short answers. They highlight their resilience, optimism, meticulousness, and creativity in their personal statement, but don't go into much detail, or demonstrate tie these traits to their experiences or efforts. The reviewer doesn't remember much about them.

You are way more than 1-2 traits! But for applications, it's important to look at your strengths and condense them into a unifying theme for the purposes of an application. Be specific, and spell out exactly how your experiences influenced your path.

Content: Talking about your research and professional experiences

Be. Specific. (About the impact - not about technical details!)

General flow:

1. What led you to try the Thing.
2. What you did and WHY.
3. What did you learn?
4. How did it lead you to your next Thing?

Leave out field specific jargon wherever possible. Explain why what you do is important in a way everyone can understand. All our reviewers are in STEM, but assignments are not guaranteed to land with an in-field reviewer.

Examples:

1. Applicant One had to take a microbiology course as a part of their general biology major. They fell in love with microscopy, leading them to apply for work in a research lab that used microscopy to study host-microbe interactions. These interactions are important and interesting because of Brief and Nontechnical Reasons. Applicant One worked with a graduate student, contributing through XYZ tasks. They eventually found that a specific receptor was necessary for bacterial invasion of the host cell. This was important because that receptor might make a good target for medications. Applicant One is now pursuing a senior thesis project that follows up on this very important finding and is applying for graduate school next year to pursue a Master's degree in Microbiology.



Vs.

2. Applicant One worked in a lab for three years doing microscopy. They study host-microbe interactions. They are now applying for graduate school after their senior year.

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3. Applicant One studies how receptor X of the host cell interacts with Ligand Y. Receptor X does all these different things that are unrelated. Receptor Y has kind of a weird structure that is disorganized. There's another side tangent in here somewhere about how AI pipelines were used to analyze all Applicant One's data, there's a lot of technical detail on this pipeline and how it distinguishes the nucleus from the cell body, but it's somehow never stated that the applicant built this pipeline themselves! They don't tie it back to their goals.

Take a look at these examples – **example 1** is more clear and memorable, even for folks outside of their field. **Example 2** is too little information. **Example 3** has too much detail in the wrong places. Technical details very necessary for other types of applications, but they won't let the applicant shine in a personal statement. If a technical detail is important to highlighting your growth/problem-solving, etc, that's great to use, so long as you explain it clearly.

Content: Talking about personal experiences, queerness or & other marginalization

A major aspect of the oSTEM application is showcasing how your LGBTQ+ identity and/or your other intersectional identities, circumstances, and activism is intertwined with your career in STEM.

Similarly, your other intersectional identities and circumstances will influence your journey, and we would love for you to discuss them in your application **to whatever extent you are comfortable doing so.**

Financial Need & Budget

oSTEM does factor in financial need as a component of several of our scholarships, however, it is not the primary metric for review.

When discussing how the oSTEM scholarship will impact your life/career/schooling, please be specific.

Examples:

Applicant One is a third-year PhD student in a Statistics program. The stipend barely covers their rent and groceries, and they have no other form of financial support. Their computer is struggling to keep up with the advanced computational models they are running, so they will use



\$1200 for an improved computer. To advance their programming skills, they will spend \$300 to attend a workshop. As they start thinking about next steps in their career, attending conferences is important for networking and practicing their presentation skills, so they will spend \$800 to attend a conference in XYZ city, to present their work on ABC.

Applicant Two works a lot and needs the scholarship.

Applicant Three is an undergrad who currently works 20 hours a week to cover tuition. They attend school full time and it's a lot to balance. The applicant is pulling a lot of late-nights to make things work. This scholarship would allow them to reduce their hours to 10 hours a week, allowing them to focus on school and their overall well-being.

Applicants One and Three are both great examples! Applicant Two leaves us wondering what the money will be used for. Even if it seems obvious, spell it out! It's important to note that oSTEM scholarships cannot be deposited to an individual: they go to the applicant's account at the university. See [this page](#) for what the scholarship can be used for, and try to highlight those elements. For graduate students, the scholarship MAY be able to supplement stipend, but it's important to check with your individual university on how they handle external grant funding.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) in oSTEM Scholarship Applications

At oSTEM, we value **your unique voice** and ask that your application materials are your own words.

We ask you to limit AI use to editing your work, such as spelling, grammar, or sentence structure. Remember, we'd like to see your thoughts, feelings, and personality shine through. Ultimately, using AI to prepare application materials is at the **discretion of the applicant**.

Applicants are responsible for submitted materials. Plagiarism or false information will result in disqualification.

Volunteer reviewers spend a significant amount of their own time reviewing your applications. Your application will **NOT** be submitted to an "AI-checker". Please review our [evaluation guidelines](#) for further information.