



THRIVE
SCHOLARS

**20
26**

APPLICATION TOOLKIT

A guide created by the Admissions team to support your Thrive Scholars application.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Keep this guide open beside your application as you work through each section. It is intended to follow the same order as the Thrive Scholars application. Use each page for tips, examples, and reminders that will help you submit a thoughtful application.

Family & Finances

3

Academic Profile & Test Scores

4

Top Colleges

5

Engagement Outside the Classroom

6

Essay Writing Guide

7

Essay and Short Answer Questions

8

Counselor/Teacher Recommendations

9

Upload Your Documents

10

What These Documents Look Like

11

How We Evaluate your Application

12

Questions

13



Family & Finances

Sharing accurate financial information helps Thrive Scholars understand your family's needs and prepare you for future financial aid steps, including the FAFSA and CSS Profile. It is important to disclose **accurate and complete information** about your family's financial situation so that we are prepared to advise you through the financial aid process your senior year.



1

Your Household

- Which description fits your family situation
- Primary language spoken at home
- Number of household members, including you
- How many are under 18
- Whether a sibling is a current Scholar, an alum, or applying this year



2

Parents & Guardians

- Your relationship to each parent or guardian
- Their name and country of birth
- Whether they currently work, and where
- Their 2025 income before taxes
- A name, email, and phone for parent info sessions (optional)



3

Money & Documents

- Other household income: benefits, support, self employment
- Whether your situation changed since last year, examples include, parent loss, changed jobs, property sold, someone moved-in or out.
- Financial documents for each parent or guardian, uploaded at the end



Your parent's/guardian's annual income can be found on **line 11** of the 2025 tax form **1040**.

*Please refer to **page 11** of this toolkit for examples of financial documents and alternatives to form 1040



Academic Profile & Test Scores

We consider your academic performance in context. Course rigor is reviewed based on the opportunities available at your school, and how you have challenged yourself throughout high school.

1

Enter Your Current Courses

- Enter all courses you are currently taking on the Academic Profile section, including classes that may not yet appear on your transcript.
- If you've taken any college courses, you can list them here as well.

2

List All Courses by Level

- List each course at the correct level: traditional/standard, honors, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), dual enrollment, or college-level.
- Include courses from every core subject area, along with electives and other academically relevant classes.

3

Upload Your Transcript

- Upload your most recent transcript as a PDF showing your 9th and 10th grade grades. **Note:** If you transferred schools, please submit transcripts from both high schools.
- Make sure the document is clear, complete, and includes your cumulative unweighted GPA.
- Review the transcript before uploading it. Confirm that your name, school, grades, and completed courses are visible.

Thrive Scholars asks for **any standardized tests scores that you have at the time of application**. If you don't have any yet, it is okay. You can let us know what tests you plan to take and when instead.

1



If you have taken the PSAT, SAT, Pre-ACT, or ACT, submit your scores.

2



If you have not taken any tests yet, you can let us know what tests you plan on taking and when.

3



Not submitting test scores will not prevent your application from being reviewed.

4



Double check that the test scores you submit are entered accurately.



Top Colleges

Research shows that where you go to school directly impacts your career opportunities and earning potential. For this reason, Thrive focuses on Scholars gaining admission to top (highly selective) colleges all across the country.

1**Rate how open you are**

to a top college, and to leaving your hometown or state.

2**Say why, briefly.**

There is no right or wrong answer. Be honest.

3**Research one new school.**

Pick a college from Thrive's Recommended Top College List you've never heard of. Spend 10–15 minutes. Tell us what draws you in.



Note: Don't worry about the cost of tuition for this exercise. Thrive College Access Managers will work with you to secure the best financial aid packages when the time comes.



Engagement Outside the Classroom

Show Your Impact



Your activities help us understand how you spend your time, what matters to you, and how you contribute to your school, family, or community.

1 What to Include

List clubs, sports, jobs, volunteer work, summer programs, family responsibilities, independent projects, religious involvement, awards and other meaningful commitments.

*Students are allowed up to ten activities.

2 What to Highlight



What you did



How you contributed



Who benefited



What you accomplished or learned

Be sure to include the leadership, recognition, or increased responsibility that best reflects who you are as a student.

3 Write Strong Descriptions

Start with an **action verb** and focus on your **impact**.

Instead of



"Member of the tutoring club."



Try



"Tutored three ninth-grade students weekly and created review materials to help them prepare for math exams."



Essay Writing Guide

Your essay is a chance to share your story, show your voice, and leave a lasting impression on admissions readers.

1

2

3

Start the Process

- Brainstorm ideas
- Create an outline
- Draft your essay

Perfect the Basics

- Use sentence variety
- Choose clear, precise words
- Break ideas into paragraphs
- Use smooth transitions

Build a Strong Structure

- Choose a common thread or theme
- Stay focused and avoid tangents
- Bring your essay full circle in the ending

4

5

6

Make the Content Matter

- Focus on yourself and your growth
- Highlight what makes your story unique
- Use descriptive details and examples
- Show what you learned from challenges

Tone & Topic Choice

- Keep a mature, balanced tone
- Avoid overly negative or dramatic language
- Write about experiences that shaped your identity
- Your topic can be a challenge, a passion, a project,, or another meaningful experience

Final Steps

- Proofread carefully
- Review and revise multiple times
- Ask trusted people for feedback

4

Use of AI Tools



Use AI as a support tool - not as a replacement for your own thinking or work.



All work produced for the Thrive Scholars applications should be original. If utilizing AI (Generative Artificial Intelligence) in your writing progress, we expect you to do so responsibly.

1

Use AI To...

- 1. Generate questions for brainstorming process.
- 2. Organize your thoughts.
- 3. To review your grammar and spelling.

2

Don't use AI To...

- 1. Submit AI-work as your own
- 2. Rely on AI as a tool to outline, draft, and write responses



Essay and Short Answer Questions

Your essay helps us to assess your writing ability and is an important criterion in our evaluation process. Please take the time to submit a well-developed and thoughtful essay. We encourage you to write several drafts and to elicit feedback from someone you trust. Also, be sure to carefully check for correct spelling and grammar.

NOTE: We recommend writing your essay drafts in an external editor such as Google Docs or Word, and copying and pasting your work onto your application once done.

TIP: Use the available additional information section to explain schedule changes, limited access to advanced-course options, grading differences, or circumstances that affected your academic record.

Essay Choices

Please respond to **ONE** of the following essay prompts (650-word maximum):

- Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
- The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
- Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
- Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?
- Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
- Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

Short Answer

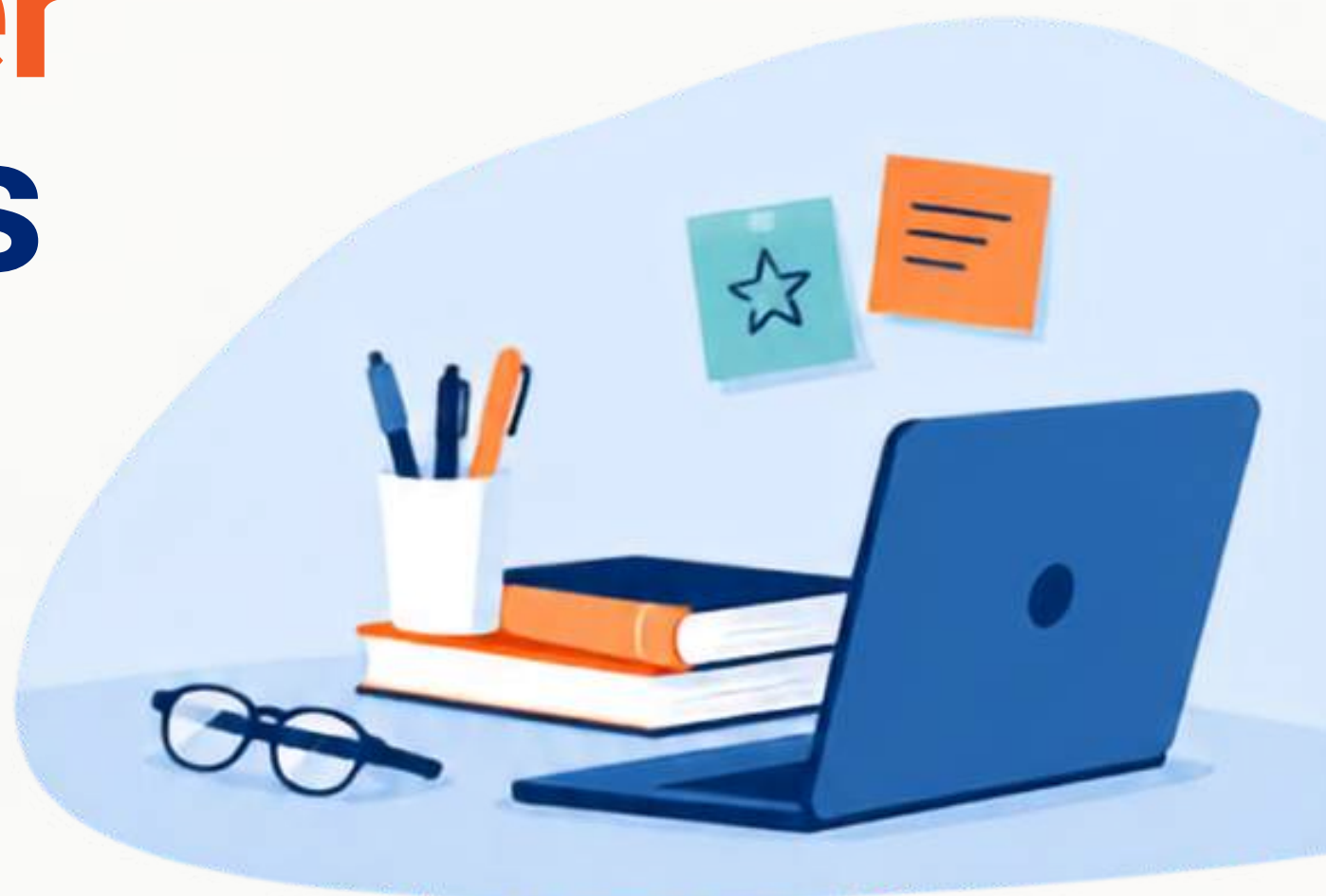
Max: 350 words

- How has your own background influenced the types of problems you want to solve, the people you want to work with, and the impact you hope you have on your community? (Max: 350 words)



Counselor/Teacher Recommendations

Your recommendations help us understand who you are as a student and the impact you make in your community and school.



Choose a teacher from a core subject and a counselor who knows you well. They should be able to speak about your strengths, growth, and involvement inside and outside the classroom.



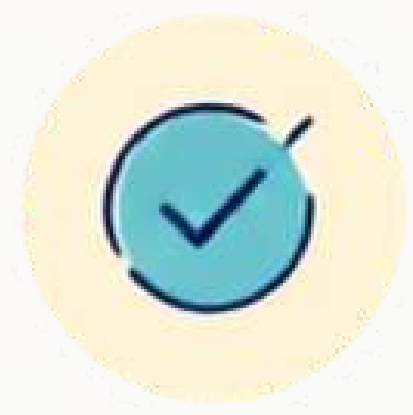
Ask Early

Reach out to your recommenders early and share the recommendation deadline so they have enough time.



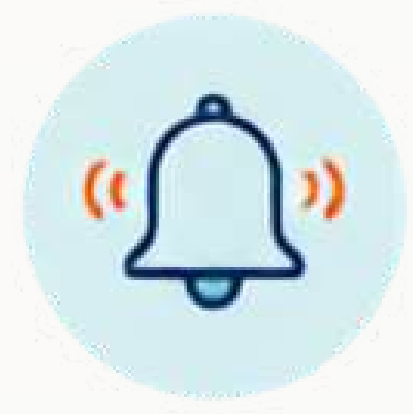
Provide Contact Information

Provide your recommender's full name, role, and school email in the Recommendation section. You can view the status of your letter in your applicant portal.



Check for Accuracy

Make sure all contact information is correct before you submit your application.



Follow Up & Thank Them

Remind them to check their inbox (and spam folder) for the request, and thank them once they submit!



Tip

Pick recommenders who know you well and can share specific examples of your **character, curiosity, leadership, and adaptability.**



Upload Your Documents

At the end of the application you upload documents for one parent or guardian, then for the second, if applicable. The income on those documents must match what you reported for each parent. Use forms from **2025**, and only the forms you actually need.

FIRST

Ask for Form 1040

- This is the form your parents filled out to file their 2025 taxes. It is the most common and the easiest.
- On page one, you will see your parent/guardian's name, any dependents, and the adjusted gross income on line 11.
- Filed jointly? One 1040 covers both. Filed separately? One 1040 for each parent.

Don't forget: you may black out the social security number. We do not need it.

IF 1040 IS NOT AVAILABLE

Alternative Documents

- **W-2** — issued by an employer, shows 2025 earnings.
- **1099** — issued for independent contractor work.
- **Pay stubs** — a last option: the most recent stub for each job, or several if the pay changes a lot week to week.

Don't forget: mixing documents is fine — a W-2 for one job and a 1099 for another job is a normal submission. If you need to submit more than one document, please submit them to our inquiry form.

International Income

Use whatever documentation your parents have — pay stubs, bank statements — and convert every number to U.S. dollars.



CURRENCY CONVERTER

xe.com/en-us/currencyconverter

No Documentation at All

In rare cases, your parents may have nothing to submit. They then download, fill out, and sign the Income Verification Form. Do **not** use this form if your parents have any of the above forms.



INCOME VERIFICATION FORM

[FY27 Income Verification Form](#)

If you have questions about any of these documents, please email admissions@thrivescholars.org.



What These Documents Look Like

Simplified sketches, not the real forms. Use them to recognize the right document and find the number we need.

Form 1040 — page one

UPLOAD THIS PAGE

Form 1040

U.S. Individual Income Tax Return · 2025

YOUR FIRST NAME

LAST NAME

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

may be hidden

DEPENDENTS

9 Total income

10 Adjustments to income

11 Adjusted gross income

Line 11 is the number that must match the income you reported.

Form W-2

Form W-2

Wage and Tax Statement · 2025

EMPLOYER

EMPLOYEE

1 WAGES, TIPS, OTHER COMP.

2 FEDERAL TAX WITHHELD

One W-2 per job. Box 1 shows the year's earnings.

Form 1099-NEC

Form 1099-NEC

Nonemployee Compensation · 2025

PAYER / RECIPIENT

1A NONEMPLOYEE COMPENSATION

Issued for contractor or freelance work.

Pay stub

Earnings Statement

Pay period 06/01 – 06/14 · Employer name

DESCRIPTION	CURRENT	YEAR TO DATE
Regular hours		
Overtime		
Gross pay		

Use **gross pay**, not take-home pay. One stub per job, or several if the pay changes week to week — the year-to-date column helps us estimate the annual total.

Finding the Annual Income on Each Document

FORM 1040

Copy **line 11** as it is written. It is already the full year's income.

FORM W-2

Take **Box 1** from every W-2 and add them together. Two jobs means two W-2s and one sum.

FORM 1099

Take **Box 1** from every 1099 and add it to any W-2 totals for the same parent.

PAY STUBS

Find **gross pay** for one pay period, then multiply by how often they are paid: weekly × 52, every two weeks × 26, twice a month × 24, monthly × 12.



How We Evaluate **your Application**

Thrive Scholars takes a **holistic** approach when evaluating a student's application. Some of the criteria we consider are academic performance, level of rigor in coursework, writing ability, involvement outside of class, personal qualities/character and socio-economic background.



Academics

GPA, course rigor, and class rank.



Extracurriculars

Clubs, programs, sports, family obligations, and volunteer work.



Essay

Including but not limited to your writing ability, identified passions, self-awareness, flow of ideas, and depth of idea development.



Organizational Fit

Receptiveness to feedback, coaching and open to attending a top college.



Questions?

If you have any questions,
please [contact us](#) or join us for a
[virtual information session](#) this fall!

Good luck, and we can't wait
to learn more about you!

