1. Give the essay questions your full attention. In particular, keep these points in mind:

   a) Be as complete as possible and provide as many details as necessary to address the questions. At the same time, please do not share anything with us that you are not comfortable sharing. Your application (except for your 100-word bio) is confidential and is reviewed only by the ACSSS-DCS Scholarship Committee members, the scholarship donors (if they require it or if they are a part of the review process), and UW employees who require access for processing or review. This audience is limited; nonetheless, we do not want you to include anything you are not comfortable sharing with these potential readers.

   b) We recommend that you review the practice copy of the application on our ACSSS scholarship website in order to prepare your responses before submitting the formal, online application. If you draft your essay responses in a word-processing program, you will be able to cut-and-paste them into the online application. That may be much easier than trying to write the essays within the boxes of the online application itself.

   c) Our scholarship application is not a test of English grammar, nor is your writing ability one of the selection criteria, but do consider this: In a scholarship competition that involves writing (such as this one), the quality of your writing will matter simply because your application will be reviewed alongside all the others received. So give it the polish it deserves. Your writing skill can help your application stand out. If you need help, take advantage of the free writing assistance available. Here on campus, the Writing Center offers free workshops and seminars as well as one-on-one writing consultations. If you’re not yet a student, take advantage of some of the Madison-area opportunities. The Madison Public Library offers free writing assistance at several locations around the city. Check their events calendar, especially the “Adults” category, to find writing help at Madison’s libraries.

2. Give yourself time to develop your Personal Essay. As the core of your application, this is the place to fully address the criteria for these scholarships, including financial need, academic success or potential, educational and career goals, commitment, and service to a wider community. Just as important may be factors that vary by individual—for example, the challenges and opportunities you face as a nontraditional student; the meaning of this scholarship in contributing to your goals; your academic, vocational, or life experiences; your family, campus or community involvement; and any financial challenges you may encounter, either as a single parent, returning adult, or other nontraditional student. Individual scholarships may include additional criteria, so please study our scholarship website as well.

Use space and paragraph breaks (like this one!) where appropriate. They will not affect or reduce the word count and they will make your essay more readable.
3. A part of the scholarship application is your **biographical statement**—a short (100-150 word) bio that gives a brief overview of what you would most like to share about yourself and your connection to UW-Madison or your studies. Unlike the rest of your application, your bio will be shared with others (i.e., printed in our awards reception program), so please compose it with that in mind.

Do you need some additional ideas for writing a bio or are you wondering what to include? Consider writing about what means the most to you, your challenges as a returning adult or single parent student, your educational or career goals, or your sources of inspiration. Here are some examples to get you started:

   a) Susan Johnson commutes 100 miles a day to reach her classes here at UW-Madison, all part of a journey to reach her goal of becoming a working artist. She hopes to complete her MFA in sculpture next year, a dream she has held onto while single-parenting her two children. She is hoping to model for them what is possible with inspiration, courage, and hard work. Not unlike many other nontraditional students, Susan has overcome many hurdles while also balancing the demands of parenting, employment, commuting, and her academic studies. Her children tell her she is doing this with grace and a sense of humor. [104 words]

   b) After taking seven years off from school to care for his aging parents, Drovkor Stovensky returned to pick up his studies in biochemistry last fall. But first he had to reclaim the academic knowledge that had been lost or that had changed in his absence from the field. It’s not the first time that he has had to back up or start over. Drovkor and his family emigrated to the U.S. when he was 14 and learning a new culture, new language, and new approaches is not “new” to him! Indeed, he feels it is all part of a full life experience, and meeting challenges has become for him a way of life. [114 words]

   c) Following in the footsteps of his parents, Edward Skate once looked forward to coming to UW-Madison as a freshman “Badger. However, the route for him turned out to be far more circuitous. Difficulties in high school grew larger after graduation and Ed made the decision to seek employment instead of college. That first job eventually led to a successful home business, but one that became too time-intensive to leave. It wasn’t until 20 years later that his wife and children convinced him to pursue the dream that once was his, and Ed is now finishing his junior year in industrial engineering. These days not even time itself can get in his way. [112 words]

   d) Katrina Anderson always knew she wanted to be a writer. She began an undergraduate degree at Cornell but switched majors early and often. Everything was too exciting to pass up so the courses and credits grew but were all too scattered to fill a major. Kate could not find a focal point and dropped out of school to find meaning later on in unexpected places. “With the birth of my daughter I learned how to focus, and finding meaning was no longer hard... she was it!” Parenting is also what brought Kate back to school, where she
is now finishing a major in journalism, determined to be the best writer and best parent for her special-needs daughter.  

4. A part of the scholarship application includes questions about previous or current employment, volunteer work, and other activities. You may include this information in the application question box or you may answer this question by uploading a copy of your resume.

5. Another component of your application is the (optional) letter of recommendation. This element can become a significant part of your application so do consider asking someone to write a letter of recommendation for you and choose a valuable reference. While it might be great to have a letter from a well-known professor, a leader in the field, or a significant member of the community, it is far more important to choose someone who knows you well. That is the person who will be able to write the strongest letter since they can point to your academic or career potential while also addressing some of the struggles you may have faced or the achievements you have recorded in reaching for those goals. A useful reference might be an instructor, an advisor, a research mentor, an employer, or a member of the community.

Confirm your reference’s email address so that all messages succeed in reaching them. And don’t forget to follow up with your reference before the scholarship deadline to ensure that they have submitted their letter of recommendation. Verify its reception by logging into your scholarship application within Scholarships@UW-Madison to check the status of your letter of recommendation. Up to two letters are acceptable.

6. Last of all, please note that, once you submit your online application, you will be able to view a copy of it but you will not be able to change or add to any part of it. So don’t forget to set up your recommenders, initiate the email request to them, upload any documents such as transcripts or resumes, and answer all scholarship questions before you hit the final “SUBMIT Application” button.