

documents for your scholarship file: the aelo swiss academy checklist

Every scholarship cycle, the same pattern repeats. Applicants pour their energy into the motivation letter, polish the essay until it sings, and then treat the supporting documents as an afterthought. That is exactly backwards. At places like AELO Swiss Academy, the committee sees the file before it falls in love with your writing. A tidy, complete, well-organized file creates the conditions for your story to land. A messy one buries it.

A few years ago I helped a student whose application sat marked "incomplete" for nearly three weeks. Her grades were excellent, her essay was genuinely moving, and none of it mattered because her diploma scan had cropped out the official seal. Three weeks of silence over a scanner setting. That experience shaped how I coach people now, and it is the reason this checklist exists.

why the file is the first filter

Think about the committee's side of the table. They review dozens of files per sitting, often in the evenings, often in batches. When a document is missing, unreadable, or untranslated, the reviewer has two options: pause your file and come back later, or move on. You want to make pausing unnecessary. A complete file reads straight through, one document leading logically to the next, and that ease of review quietly signals something about you. It says you can follow instructions, respect deadlines, and handle administration, which matters in any academic setting and especially in Switzerland, where paperwork culture is thorough by design.

The good news is that a strong file is not complicated. It is a fixed set of documents, gathered early, formatted consistently, and checked against the current requirements published for your intake. Requirements do shift between cycles, so treat the official AELO Swiss Academy scholarship page and any email from admissions as the final word. What follows is the structure that works in almost every case, plus the details that trip people up.

the academic core: transcripts and diplomas

Start with the documents that prove where you have studied and how you performed. That means transcripts from every secondary school and every university you attended, even if you left after a single semester. Committees notice gaps, and an unexplained missing term raises more questions than a modest grade ever will. Add your final diploma or school-leaving certificate. If you are still completing your current program, include your most recent transcript plus a letter from your school confirming your expected graduation date and, where possible, predicted results.

One detail that gets overlooked constantly: the grading scale. A Swiss reviewer may not know what a grade of "C" or a 7 out of 10 means in your country's system. If your transcript does not include a grading key, add a short note explaining the scale, what counts as top marks, and where you sit within it. It takes five minutes to write and saves the reviewer from guessing. I have watched applicants go from "good grades, unclear context" to "clearly a strong student" with nothing more than one explanatory paragraph attached to the transcript.

proof of language, done the right way

Most programs at AELO Swiss Academy are taught in English, and some pathways involve German or French depending on the program and location. Your file needs to show you can handle the language of instruction, and

committees tend to prefer standardized proof: IELTS, TOEFL, Cambridge certificates, or comparable tests. Keep validity windows in mind, because language certificates commonly expire after about two years. A certificate that lapsed last spring will not help you this autumn, no matter how good the score was.

Two practical notes. First, check whether the academy wants an official score report sent directly by the testing organization or accepts your scan at the scholarship stage. The rules can differ between the scholarship review and the formal admission step, and applicants mix these up every year. Second, if your previous education was entirely in the language of instruction, a letter or certificate from your school confirming that can sometimes stand in for a test. If you think you qualify for that route, ask admissions before you pay for a test you may not need.

money on paper: the financial file

Scholarship files usually ask you to demonstrate the gap you cannot cover, not to display your family's entire wealth. The cleanest version of this is a short financial summary followed by supporting evidence: bank statements covering roughly the last three to six months, proof of income or employment for whoever is funding you, and, if a sponsor is involved, a signed letter from that sponsor stating their commitment in plain language.

Committees read bank statements more carefully than applicants expect. A large unexplained deposit two weeks before the application looks odd, even when the explanation is innocent. If your statements contain anything unusual, a property sale, a gift, a currency conversion, attach a brief signed note explaining it. Transparency on paper is far cheaper than a follow-up email asking you to explain it later.

There is also a second life for this file. If your scholarship or place is confirmed, the Swiss residence permit process will require proof that you can support yourself during your studies. The financial documents you compile now will be reused later, so build them properly the first time and keep them in a folder you can reopen.

recommendations and the motivation letter

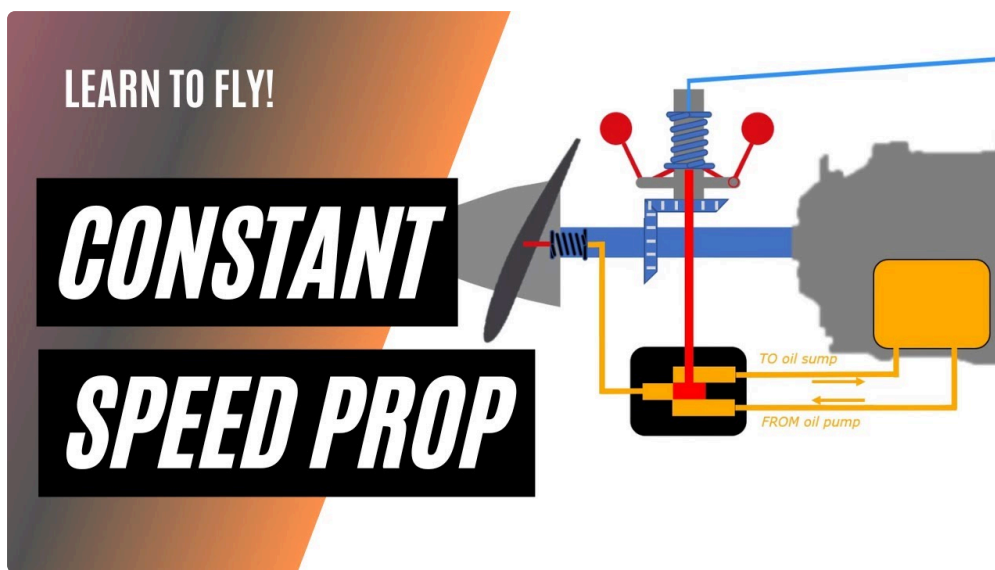
Most scholarship applications ask for two recommendation letters, occasionally three. The instinct is to chase the most impressive title, and it is usually the wrong instinct. A letter from someone who actually watched you work beats a vague note from someone important who barely knows your name. One student I advised swapped a well-known professor who barely remembered her for her direct lab supervisor, and the new letter was specific, warm, and instantly more convincing.

Whatever letters you collect, make sure they are signed and dated, on letterhead where that is normal for the writer, and submitted the way the application requests, which sometimes means the referee uploads or emails them directly. A letter with no date and no signature reads like a template, even when it is sincere.

Your motivation letter, meanwhile, should stay in the one to two page range and be relentlessly concrete: what you want to study, why this academy, why Switzerland, and what you plan to do with it afterwards. Committees often read these in a few minutes. Specificity wins.

identity, photos, and the small stuff

The identity set sounds trivial and stalls more files than you would believe. Include a clear copy of your passport, valid well beyond your arrival date; six months of validity past your intended start is the safe rule. Prepare passport photos to specification rather than cropping an old photo. Some steps, particularly the Swiss residence process, may also ask for a birth certificate, so it costs you nothing to have a certified copy ready.



Then there is the name question. If your passport name differs from your transcripts, through marriage, transliteration, or an official name change, include the document that links the two. I once watched an application bounce back and forth for a week because "Ana" appeared on the diploma and "Anna" on the passport, and nobody had attached the marriage certificate that explained it. Reviewers cannot connect dots you do not give them.

formatting: scans, translations, and apostilles

How a document looks matters as much as what it says. Scan at around 300 dpi in color whenever seals, stamps, or signatures are involved, because grayscale scans can wash out embossed seals entirely. Save each document as its own PDF with a sensible filename such as surname_firstname_transcript.pdf, rather than stacking everything into one giant file. Reviewers navigate dozens of files a day, and clear labels are a small kindness that pays off.

If your documents are not already in the language the academy requests, typically English, get certified translations from a recognized or sworn translator, and keep the original and the translation together so they can be read side by side. Public documents from countries in the Hague Apostille Convention generally need an apostille; documents from countries outside it may need full legalization through a consulate. These rules shift depending on your country and the document type, so confirm the current expectation with AELO Swiss Academy admissions before you spend money on either. Apostilles and translations take weeks in some jurisdictions, which leads straight to timing.

your one-page checklist

When everything above is gathered, your core file should contain five building blocks, each in its own clearly labeled PDF:

- **Academic records:** transcripts from every institution, your diploma or an expected-graduation letter, and a grading key where the scale is not obvious.
- **Language proof:** a valid certificate, or documented evidence that your prior education was in the language of instruction.
- **Financial file:** statements for the last three to six months, income evidence, and a signed sponsor letter if someone else is funding you.
- **Identity set:** a clear passport copy, specification-compliant photos, and any name-change or link documents.
- **Support documents:** two signed and dated recommendation letters plus your motivation letter, each saved as a clean, correctly named PDF.

documents people forget

Beyond the core, a handful of extras appear in many Swiss applications, and scrambling for them at the deadline is avoidable:

- **A current CV**, one to two pages, with dates that line up exactly with your transcripts.
- **A portfolio or audition recording**, if your program is creative or performance based, following the format the program specifies.
- **Health insurance confirmation**, since coverage is mandatory in Switzerland and some programs ask for proof early.
- **A criminal record or good conduct certificate**, where the program or the later residence process requests one.
- **Medical or vaccination records**, mainly relevant if you will live in campus housing and the housing office asks for them.

None of these are universal, so treat them as a "check whether it applies to you" list rather than a mandate.

a realistic timeline

Work backwards from the deadline and give the slowest documents the longest runway. Apostilles and legalizations can take anywhere from a few days to several weeks depending on your country. Certified translators typically need several days per document, longer in busy seasons. Referees deserve two to three weeks of grace, both out of courtesy and because a rushed letter reads like one. For international applicants, I suggest starting the file roughly three months before the deadline; if your documents are all close to home, six to eight weeks can be enough. The single most common timing failure is assuming that a document which took a week last year will take a week this year. Sometimes it will. Plan for the year it does not.

mistakes that quietly stall good files

Having reviewed plenty of these files alongside applicants, I can tell you the failures are rarely dramatic. Gaps in study history that nobody explained. Scans so compressed the seals vanished. Language certificates that expired the month before submission. Recommendation letters missing dates or signatures. And the classic: everything

merged into one enormous PDF in no particular order, forcing the reviewer to hunt for the transcript they know exists somewhere on page forty.

When a formatting rule seems fussy, follow it anyway. Committees reward files that are easy to review, and they remember the applicants who made their job simpler. That [Gleim pilot test prep](#) is not unfair; it is human, and it works in your favor once you understand it.

after you hit submit

Keep a master folder that mirrors exactly what you sent, with the date of submission noted. When the committee writes to request one missing page, they usually set a short clock, and a fast, complete reply is your last chance to make a good impression. Never mail original documents unless you are explicitly told to; send certified copies and keep the originals safe at home. And if you win, remember that this same file feeds directly into your admission confirmation and Swiss residence permit steps. The tidy folder you built for the scholarship keeps paying off long after the decision email arrives.

one last thing

A scholarship file will never be the most exciting part of applying to AELO Swiss Academy, but it is the part you have complete control over. Your grades are what they are, your referees write what they write, and your story is your story. The file, though, is pure craft. Build it early, check it against the current official requirements, label everything like someone busy will read it, because someone busy will. Do that, and the rest of your application finally gets the attention it deserves.