

Essay Writing Tips

The first thing you have to realize is that a wonderful, marvelous, sterling essay does not necessarily assure your admission into a college if the rest of your application record is not up to par. However, if you are a "maybe," it can push you ahead of the pack of applicants.

College application essays are **NOT** English themes. Although you must be aware of the proper rules of good essay writing, what the college admissions folks are looking at is how the essay helps to make your application file more "human." They want to find out about what sort of person you are. How well can you convey "you" to them? Tell your story in such a way that your specialness—your feelings, perceptions, values, commitments, and abiding interests—seeps through of its own accord. Although this seems to be a daunting task, it does not have to be. The following are some tips for you to follow as you plan and write your essay.

- The essay is one of the few things that you've got complete control over in the application process. You've already earned most of your grades; you've already made most of your impressions on teachers; and chances are, you've already found a set of activities you're interested in continuing. So when you write the essay, view it as something more than just a page to fill up with writing. View it as an opportunity to tell the admissions committee about who you are as a person.
- Be yourself. If you are funny, write a funny essay; if you are serious, write a serious essay. Don't start reinventing yourself with the essay.
- If you are recounting an amusing and light-hearted anecdote from your childhood, it does not have to read like a legal document—make it fun!
- Tell the admissions folks something different from what they will read on your list of extracurricular activities or transcript.
- Take the time to go beyond the obvious. Think about what most students might write in response to the questions and then try something a little different.
- Don't try to take on too much. Focus on one "most influential person," one event, or one activity. Tackling too much tends to make your essay too watered down or disjointed.
- Concentrate on topics of true significance to you. Don't be afraid to reveal yourself in your writing. Admissions people want to know who you are and how you think.
- Write thoughtfully and from your heart. It will be clear who believes in what they are saying versus those who are simply saying what they think admissions people want to hear.
- Essays should have a thesis that is clear to both the writer and the reader. Your thesis should indicate where you are going and what you are trying to communicate from the outset.
- Answer each school's essay individually. Recycled "utility essays" come across as impersonal and sanitized. The only exception to this is an essay written and submitted to the Common Application Member Schools.
- Keep your essay concise and to the point.
- Limit the number of people from whom you request feedback on your essay. Too much input creates an essay that sounds as though it has been written by a committee and you lose your own voice in the revisions.
- Appearance cannot replace substance, but your final draft should be flawless.

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