



The College Essay

The essay is a very powerful part of the application process. If the colleges to which you are applying require an essay, you should look at this as an opportunity to add an important dimension to your application. Essays are reviewed by people who are trying to discern the role that you will play in their campus community. Be yourself and let your voice come through.

Essay tips

Finding the right topic

- Try not to write about something just because you think it is what the admission counselor wants to read. There is no perfect response to any essay question. Writing for an audience may cause you to write something that does not ring true to the reader.
- No one can tell the exact same story as you. Assume that someone else in the applicant pool will be writing about a similar subject; make yours specific to you. For example, if you choose to write about doing community service, add details that make your experience stand out.
- No topic is boring... if told the right way. With enough detail and creativity, almost any topic can be a good one.
- Stay positive! You want admission counselors to want to meet you.
- If you are still struggling to find the right topic, ask a friend, family member, or your College or Guidance Counselor to help brainstorm ideas with you. Take the time to pay attention to details in your daily life – the people, the circumstances, and the experiences that make you who you are.

Format of the essay

- Grab the reader's attention right away. The admission counselor shouldn't have to work hard to figure out what you are writing about.
- When in doubt, use the first person. The sentence, "when you volunteer, you learn more about yourself" sounds much stronger if it is written, "as a volunteer, I learned..."
- "Show" rather than "tell" your story.
- The essay should be 1/3 about the story and 2/3 about how the event or person impacted you.

Length of essays

- Follow the application instructions. Most colleges will tell you what you should be aiming for in either page-length or word-count.

- Some schools may explicitly tell you that you cannot exceed a certain length. If so, stick to their rules and see your College Counselor or another trusted advisor to help you meet your goal.
- Be concise! Admission counselors have limited time to spend on the essay; make every word count.

Proofreading

- Ask someone who knows you well to read your essay. Ask them to tell you what they think you were hoping to convey.
- Read your essay aloud – even just to yourself. You might find mistakes or awkward phrases that your eyes have glossed over when reading silently.
- Once you have finished your essay, put it aside for a few days. Come back to it in a few days. A fresh perspective will bring new energy and new insight to your words.
- Avoid procrastination; careless mistakes are made when you feel the pressure of a deadline.

Resources

- Your best resources will be the people in your life whom you trust. Parents, teachers, friends, and School or College Counselors are all people to consider.
- There are many “college-essay” websites - some that are more legitimate than others. Please consult your College Counselor before using any on-line help. Never plagiarize any portion of your essay or let anyone else write it for you. Colleges investigate suspected plagiarism.