

# College Application Essays



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Applying to college can be an overwhelming and stressful time. However, writing college application essays can be an opportunity for you to showcase your talent and skills to an admissions committee.

Here are a few things to keep in mind while writing your essay:

- First, make sure to read the prompt and answer the question. Oftentimes, colleges will let you choose from multiple options. Pay attention to the word limit required so that you can organize your essay accordingly.
- *Show*, don't *tell* the person who you are through your essay. Use vivid details and examples that really convey your personality to the admissions committee. Use figurative language and interesting anecdotes to enhance your writing.
- Don't be afraid of being yourself. Illustrate your strengths, qualities, and experiences. Even if you haven't had prodigious experience in life, talk about specific lessons you have learned through your years in high school that have contributed to your growth as a person. If you are a non-traditional student, address what you have learned during the time spent outside of school.
- When appropriate, let the admissions committee know why you want to attend a specific college, as well as how the college will help you achieve your academic and career goals. Research the college and the program you intend to attend beforehand so you are well informed; however, make sure that you aren't just quoting and paraphrasing a college website/brochure, but rather explaining what about the college or program appealed to you.
- Show the college that you will be a valuable asset to their community. Share examples of volunteer and/or work experience and extra-curricular activities to illustrate how you will contribute to the academic and cultural life of the campus.
- People are not perfect, and we don't have perfect records. If you have low grades or any other issues that you believe may affect your admission, address those issues in the application essay and own up to it. Explain any steps taken to improve your record, but don't make excuses or try to dismiss it.
- Finally, and perhaps most importantly, proofread! Your essay should be completely free of errors. Even one spelling or grammatical mistake can jeopardize your application.

## Example of an Undergraduate Application Essay from John Hopkins University:

### Switching Shoes

It was a wet and dreary October evening. I shook off the dirt from my cleats on the concrete with frustration. Click, clack, click. The sound echoed through my head until I finally rested my heavy legs on the wooden bench in front of my locker. Up until that practice, I had done everything just the way I had the year before in the Netherlands, yet I still did not reap the same successes. At home, I relished being on the national under 15 field hockey team, consistently having high grades, and knowing just about everyone. At Deerfield, however, simply doing my best at practice, finishing my homework and socializing did not yield the same results. Looking down, I began to wonder why I had ever moved to Deerfield and traded my field hockey gear for muddy soccer cleats.

In search of answers, I decided to tell Deerfield's field hockey coach about my tough transition. But instead of an answer, Ms. McVaugh offered for me to join a girls' field hockey practice. I felt thrown off by the unusual opportunity at first, yet I quickly relished a warm rush of excitement surging through my veins as I imagined putting on field hockey cleats again. When I set foot on the turf the following day, however, my initial anxiety rejoined my exuberance. I felt more eyes turning towards me with each step I made. "Boys do not play field hockey," I could hear the girls think. As I trailed behind the girls during the warm-up, the thought of quitting seemed more tempting with each second of silence that passed. But when the whistle blew and the ball was finally in play, I was surprised to see how quickly the gender barrier vanished. Where there was silence and separation at first, I could now see the shared fanaticism through our red faces and hear the emotion in our clamor. At the end of practice, I felt a burning glow of joy overtake my body as I caught my breath on the bench. In that moment, I gradually realized how I should not let obstacles, like gender boundaries in field hockey, hold me back from exploring new opportunities.

Realizing the joy I had found in trying the unconventional, I took this experience to the soccer field to take on its new athletic challenges once again. Rather than agonizing over playing time or titles, I simply redirected my focus on the joy and beauty of the sport. Within days, I noticed the same atmosphere of sweat and screams from the turf take hold of the soccer field. Over time, this helped me take in feedback more readily, ask questions about tactics, and try out new skills. With each new improvement I made through this, I slowly began to grasp the value of my new approach to the sport.

As a result, I decided to bring the same open, curious, and risk-taking mindset with me to the other opportunities that boarding school holds. In the classroom, I began asking deeper questions to fully comprehend new material. Back in the dorm, I turned the cultural differences between my peers into opportunities to learn from and contribute back to. From truly grasping nucleophile-electrophile reactions in organic chemistry to sharing Dutch 'stroopwafels' with my hall, such moments remind me of why I sacrificed my field hockey gear to go to Deerfield; even

as my new mindset gradually led to the grades, friendships, and even athletic achievements I sought before, I realized that I value the exploration, growth and joy behind such successes far more.

Now, before I put on my cleats, walk into the classroom or enter my dorm, I do not worry about the successes I might fail to reach or the obstacles that might hold me back. Rather, I pour my heart into such opportunities and take their experiences with me.

**Comments from the John Hopkins University Admissions Committee for the Example Essay:**

“[The] essay connects the skills [the student] learned from switching sports—seeking out advice, taking risks, and being open-minded—to other aspects of his life. He shares with the admissions committee traits that he values as well as concrete examples of how those traits have defined the way he handles situations. By doing so, [the student] demonstrates that he understands the larger significance of his experience and how he’ll carry those takeaways with him moving forward.”

**Source:**

John Hopkins University Undergraduate Admissions. “Essays That Worked.” *John Hopkins University*, 2020, <https://apply.jhu.edu/application-process/essays-that-worked/>.



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