

College Admissions Essays - Tips for Writing a Strong Essay

Is the college admissions essay really important? YES!!!

- Paula LaManna with University of Cincinnati says, "The advice that I give to students is to think of this essay as your interview. We would love to meet and interview all of our applicants, but we are unable to do so. This is your opportunity to tell us about you - the person outside of your grades and GPA."
- Karen Richardson, admissions dean at Tufts University in Massachusetts says that in a college essay, "we're actually listening for a student's voice, trying to figure out who they would be on our campus."
- Ellen Kim, dean of undergraduate admissions at Maryland's Johns Hopkins University says, "You can think of the essay as the soul of the application. While we recognize that it takes years of hard work and dedication to build a strong college application over a high school career, what helps an admissions committee picture you in our classrooms, in our clubs, and in our community is your own voice and perspective. The essay is a space for us to see that come to life."
- **A well-written application essay could tip an admission decision in your favor**

General Tips for Essay

- Showcase your personality - this is your chance to talk directly to the admissions office and show who you are as a person
- Be concise, coherent, pleasant, honest, and accurate
- Stay within given word count
- Write the essay in YOUR VOICE - Be and Sound like Yourself!
 - Don't use words you wouldn't normally use or write in a style that is not reflective of you
 - Sell yourself as you are, so that your writing & having a conversation with you feel the same

What should you write about?

- Avoid re-stating your resume or writing about your entire life's history
 - "A good essay to me, in general, is one where I learn something about the student that I wouldn't learn elsewhere in the application," says Monica Inzer, vice president for enrollment management at Hamilton College in New York.
- This is not an autobiography - keep a narrow focus - write about something that's important to you
 - Write about a specific experience, hobby, or quirk that reveals something personal about you, like how you think, what you value, or what your strengths are. Choose something that has had an impact on your life.
 - Tell a story that offers insight into who you are as a person
 - Think carefully before writing about a negative experience or personal weakness - you want your essay to portray you positively
 - Even if you discuss an influential teacher or mentor, you should keep focus on you, perhaps discussing how that person drove you to change or to take action.
- Keep your essay's focus on you
- You don't have to discuss a major achievement in your essay. A memorable essay can be on a seemingly ordinary topic like fly-fishing, your commute to and from school, or an important object
 - You don't need to have started your own business or have spent the summer hiking the Appalachian Trail. Colleges are looking for thoughtful, motivated students.
 - Include reflection - discuss how what you've written about changed you or your outlook

Example Essay Topics

- A Defining Moment, Experience, or Realization: An experience that changed your perspective; a strong belief you no longer hold
- Someone Who Has Greatly Influenced You: A person who changed your life for the better
- A Key Part of Your Identity: An important aspect about you that you wish more people knew; your best characteristic
- Your Biggest Passion: A cause for which you've sacrificed; how this helped shape who you are
- A Problem You Solved: A significant obstacle you overcame; a solution you developed that achieved results
- A Unique Hobby: Your most enjoyable pastime; a time when your hobby taught you a valuable lesson

How to Approach Your Essay

- Before you start to write your essay, admissions experts advise that you do a reflection exercise with yourself.
 - Ask yourself questions such as
 - *What do I have to offer the world?*
 - *What are my quirks?*
 - *What makes me stand out?*
 - *Who am I at my core?*
 - *What do I want out of my college experience at this school?"*
- Outline what you want to discuss and the order in which you think you'll write about it
- Focus on your opening sentence - it should grab your reader's attention
- Your essay is also gauging writing skills, so you want to make sure you submit a well-written piece
- SHOW, DON'T TELL
 - Karen Richardson, dean of admissions and enrollment management at Tufts University in Massachusetts says, a student's essay is evaluated "not just about the topic that a student chooses to write on, but rather, how they write about it. We encourage students to show rather than tell to help the reader get a sense of who they are."
 - Include vivid details or anecdotes
 - Be specific so the details bring your essay to life for the admissions officer who is reading hundreds of personal statements
 - **For example**, if you're writing about how much you loved playing your high school sport, tell a story about a specific game-winning play (or a devastating loss), how you felt, and what you learned.
- Tell a story about yourself with a beginning, middle, and end.
 - Hook the reader with a compelling opening paragraph—surprise or teach the reader or share something vulnerable and make the reader curious to read more
 - Close with a clear ending that ties back to your opening or provides a captivating conclusion
- Think differently - stand out from any common application essay
 - Once you've got the basics of what you want to say set in your mind, try delivering it from a different angle
 - For example, rather than answering an essay prompt directly, you answer it in the negative: tell the reader what you're not going to do with the essay before telling them what you will do.
 - Or, if the question asks what your ambitions for the future are, instead answer with what you don't aspire to, and what that says about you.
 - Consider starting with a question. Challenge the reader by speaking directly to him/her. (Or) put the reader in the middle of things. Place the reader in the middle of something happening or in the middle of a conversation.
 - So, for example, if you want to tell the story of a piano recital, start with "So there I was, in front of a thousand people, and my hands were shaking so much I could barely touch the keys." Then fill in how you got to that point and what it says about you.

What should you avoid doing in your essay?

- Don't write an admissions essay about something you think sounds impressive or that you think the admissions officer wants to read
- Don't simply mimic other essay examples you've read. **Write about something truly important to you.**
- Don't lie or exaggerate
- Don't try to guess what you think the admissions officer wants to read. Choose a topic that matters to you.
- Don't repeat yourself

BEFORE SUBMITTING YOUR ESSAY, BE CERTAIN TO PROOFREAD, PROOFREAD, AND THEN PROOFREAD AGAIN - Consider asking someone you trust to look over your essay