

College Application Essay

The essay is an opportunity for you to personalize your college application beyond grades and scores. It can also be one of the more nerve-wracking parts of the application process. Use these tips to write an application-worthy essay.

What the Essay Can Do for You

A powerful, well-written essay can make a difference and elevate an applicant in an admission committee's eyes when colleges have to choose between applicants with similar qualifications.

You can also use the essay to show that you've thought carefully about why you're a good match for the college you're applying to. You can show your commitment to learning and your eagerness to contribute to the college community.

What Is a Well-Written Essay?

Admissions officers read a lot of essays, and a well-written one can make a refreshing change. Be sure to check your essay(s) against these criteria:

- Does the essay provide a direct answer to the essay question?
- Does it have a strong opening paragraph that captures the reader's interest?
- Does it put forth a comprehensive argument or narrative? Do you make a point and stick to it?
- Does it have a natural style that's comfortable for you and appropriate for the subject matter?
- Did you use effective word choice, syntax, and structure?
- Does it contain correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling?
- Is it succinct? Did you pay attention to the recommended length?

Tips for Writing Your Essay

1: Start early. More time = less stress. You'll have plenty of time to give the essay your best effort.

2: Be yourself. One of the biggest mistakes students make is writing what they think others want to hear, rather than about an issue, event, or person they care about. An essay like that is not just boring to write. It's boring to read. What interests you? What do you love to talk about? Write about that. Think of your essay as a creative way to help college officials get to know you as a person.

3: Be honest. College admission officers have read hundreds, even thousands of essays. They are masters at discovering any form of plagiarism. Don't risk your college career by buying an essay off the internet or getting someone else to write your essay.

4: Stay focused. Read the essay question carefully. Jot down a few ideas, then choose the one that looks like the most fun to write about. Stick to that main theme throughout the essay. Essays can help you make your case to admission officials, but don't go overboard. There will be opportunities elsewhere in the application to list all your achievements.

5: Put your best foot forward. Applying online may feel like you're sending email, but you're not. Incorrect capitalization or abbreviations like B4 or "thanx" are not appropriate for a formal document. Make sure your essay represents the best of you.

6: Write and rewrite. Don't try to knock out a masterpiece on your first try. For your first draft, write anything that comes to mind about your topic. Let it "rest" for a few hours or a few days. When you come back to the draft, look for ways to make it more focused and better written. Are there details that don't really relate to the topic? Cut them. Do you need another example? Put it in.

7: Get a second opinion. When you've rewritten the essay to your satisfaction, find someone who can give you advice on how to make it even better. Choose a person you respect and who knows something about writing. Ask them to tell you what they like best about your essay, and what you can do to improve it.

8: Keep an open mind. Criticism can be tough to hear, but try to listen with an open mind. You don't have to make every change suggested. After all, it's your essay and no one else's. But you should seriously consider each suggestion.

9: Proofread, proofread, proofread. Little errors creep in throughout the writing and editing process. Before you submit your essay, make sure to proofread. Try reading your essay aloud or having someone else read it to you. Another strategy is to read the essay backward, from the last sentence to the first. Errors your eye may have previously skipped over will jump out at you.

10: Don't expect too much from an essay. The application essay is important. But admission officers look at the whole package — your academics, extracurricular activities, standardized tests, and other factors. Make your essay as well-written as you can, but don't put so much pressure on yourself that the rest of the application fades in importance.

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