

YOUR JOURNEY TO COLLEGE

The College Essay-Make It Count



The college admissions officer asks for an essay for one main purpose – to get to know who you are and what is important to you. They will utilize this information to determine if you are a good fit for their campus community. They will seek to investigate what you have to offer that will be different from someone who has similar statistics. What makes you unique and what will you bring to their campus? Your purpose should be to convey the answers to these basic questions in a well-thought out, well-written essay that will give the Admissions Committee some insight into your basic value system, talents, ability to overcome adversity and your outlook on life in general. They are looking for you to convey this information in an insightful and interesting venue as well.

In addition to seeking the answers to the above questions, they will be looking for your basic writing style, sentence structure and knowledge of vocabulary and spelling, and your ability to write well as this will be important at the college level. The content of your essay will be just as important. You should strive to convey your statement or story in a concise and creative manner.

Rather than look at this piece of the process as a chore or one that inspires procrastination on your part, embrace it as a way for you to show the college why they should admit you and to showcase all you have to offer beyond your academic and extracurricular profile. Writing the essay is generally difficult but it is important to make the most of this opportunity to shine!

Here are some guidelines:

Give careful consideration and thought to the questions being asked of you. Answer the questions in a forum that will tell the Admissions Committee about who you are and what inspires you.

Create an outline from which to work. Write, write and re-write!

Do not rush the process or leave it for the last minute.

Be reflective, creative, honest and interesting. Do not pick a topic that you feel will interest the committee–pick one that excites you.

Handle sensitive topics appropriately and with discretion and good taste.

Think small rather than big – make sure your topic is focused enough that it is covered well. Show, don't tell, what you want to convey.

Avoid common themes – the big game, death of a pet, boyfriend/girlfriend issues, recent movies, life histories, trendy causes, or ways to save the world.

Captivate your audience with an outstanding introduction.

Do not repeat information that can be found in other parts of your application.

Ask people to proofread – parents, teachers, siblings, etc.

Do not use words that you would not normally say. Focus on the correct word and an interesting way to express your natural vocabulary. Avoid gimmicks or attempts at humor that fall short.

Make sure that you write the essay – college readers can tell the difference.

Read sample essays, questions and answers. Try some books such as:

50 Essays That Worked – Baykin Curry & Bryan Kasbar

The Element of Style – William Strunk Jr. & E.B. White

On Writing the College Application Essay: The Key to Acceptance and the College of Your Choice – Harry Bauld

Rock Hard Apps – How to Write a Killer College Application – Katherine Cohen

Make sure your final draft is error-free!