

Dear CAP Seniors,

First semester senior year can be a busy and stressful time when the pressures associated with academic demands, extra-curricular activities, and the college admission process are acutely felt. In order to prepare for a busy fall semester, please work on the following over the summer.

ADVANCED EXHIBITIONS

Your first Advanced Exhibition (AE) is due on the second day of school. You have a choice about which one to turn in first: School/Community Impact OR Area of Emphasis. Either way, the second AE is due by the 2nd week of October). Please refer to the [CAP Portfolio Guide](#) for assistance in developing in your Advanced Exhibition. For each AE you should write a reflection (see the templates below), journal or vlog (with at least eight entries), and collect artifacts.

- Some past AE [examples](#)
- Rubric [link](#) for each
- Impact on School/Community reflection [link](#)
- Area of Emphasis reflection [link](#)
- [Presentation Rubric](#) (your choice presented 2nd week of school, the next 2nd week of October)

COLLEGE ESSAY

In order to prepare you for the first semester of your senior year, we highly recommend that you write one Common Application college essay during the course of the summer and consider writing a second one related to a particular school you intend to apply to. We will collect college essays at the end of the 2nd week of school to offer feedback and then ask you to submit a final draft by the first week of October.

Here are some college essay writing tips:

- John Hopkins' ["Essays that Worked" Class of 2025](#) (examples of college essays and notes on why they worked)
- See more tips below from Princeton University

If you have any questions regarding your Advanced Exhibition or college essay topic you may email Mr. Wannen or Ms. Warner (Senior Seminar teachers) at kyle_j_wannen@mcpsmd.org or jordan_e_warner@mcpsmd.org or email Ms. Fillman at sarah.g.fillman@mcpsmd.net.

Sincerely,

Sarah Fillman, Coordinator, Communication Arts Program
Kyle Wannen & Jordan Warner, Senior Seminar Teachers

The College Essay

Tips (From a Dean of Admissions from Princeton University):

1. Tell a story. It does not have to be a long story, but you must reveal your voice.
2. Read some examples of good writing to get you on the right track. Often, other writers can inspire you or provide you with an idea for your essay.
3. Be honest. Make sure your essay reflects who you are, not some idealized version of yourself. Don't try and impress anyone.
 - a. It is okay to get your essay checked for grammar and spelling. However, you do not want your essay to be revised to the point where you lose your own voice.
 - b. Authenticity is extremely important
4. Don't try and make the essay carry too heavy a load. It is a part of the admissions process, but not the only part. Essays that try and cram extra information into them usually are ineffective.
 - a. Don't drop names or announce that your parent is an alumni at the school.
 - b. Avoid trying to fit an essay that you have written for another school into a different question. Admissions officers can usually tell that you are doing this and they do not appreciate it.

Fred Hargadon, Dean of Admissions at Princeton University (formerly of Swarthmore and Stanford)

Write an Effective Application Essay A great application essay will present a vivid, personal, and compelling view of you to the admissions staff. It will round out the rest of your application and help you stand out from the other applicants. The essay is one of the only parts of your application over which you have complete control, so take the time to do a good job on it. Check out these tips before you begin.

Dos

Keep Your Focus Narrow and Personal Your essay must prove a single point or thesis. The reader must be able to find your main idea and follow it from beginning to end. Try having someone read just your introduction to see what he thinks your essay is about.

Essays that try to be too comprehensive end up sounding watered-down. Remember, it's not about telling the committee what you've done—they can pick that up from your list of activities—instead, it's about showing them who you are.

Prove It Develop your main idea with vivid and specific facts, events, quotations, examples, and reasons. There's a big difference between simply stating a point of view and letting an idea unfold in the details:

- **Okay:** "I like to be surrounded by people with a variety of backgrounds and interests"
- **Better:** "During that night, I sang the theme song from Casablanca with a baseball coach who thinks he's Bogie, discussed Marxism with a little old lady, and heard more than I ever wanted to know about some woman's gall bladder operation."

Be Specific Avoid clichéd, generic, and predictable writing by using vivid and specific details.

- **Okay:** "I want to help people. I have gotten so much out of life through the love and guidance of my family, I feel that many individuals have

not been as fortunate; therefore, I would like to expand the lives of others."

- **Better:** "My Mom and Dad stood on plenty of sidelines 'til their shoes filled with water or their fingers turned white, or somebody's golden retriever signed his name on their coats in mud. I think that kind of commitment is what I'd like to bring to working with fourth-graders."

Don'ts

Don't Tell Them What You Think They Want to Hear Most admissions officers read plenty of essays about the charms of their university, the evils of terrorism, and the personal commitment involved in being a doctor. Bring something new to the table, not just what you think they want to hear.

Don't Write a Resume Don't include information that is found elsewhere in the application. Your essay will end up sounding like an autobiography, travelogue, or laundry list. Yawn.

- "During my junior year, I played first singles on the tennis team, served on the student council, maintained a B+ average, traveled to France, and worked at a cheese factory."

Don't Use 50 Words When Five Will Do Eliminate unnecessary words.

- **Okay:** "Over the years it has been pointed out to me by my parents, friends, and teachers—and I have even noticed this about myself, as well—that I am not the neatest person in the world."

- **Better:** "I'm a slob."

Don't Forget to Proofread Typos and spelling or grammatical errors can be interpreted as carelessness or just bad writing. Don't rely on your computer's spell check. It can miss spelling errors like the ones below.

- "After I graduate *form* high school, I plan to work for a nonprofit organization during the summer."
- "From that day on, Daniel was my best *fried*."

This article is based on information found in *The College Application Essay*, by Sarah Myers McGinty.