

The Do's and Don'ts of Essay Writing:

Do

- **Read the Directions Carefully! Answer the question!**
- Keep Your Focus Narrow and Personal
 - Your essay must prove a single point
 - Have a main idea and follow it from beginning to end
 - It's not about telling the committee what you've done – it's about showing them who you are
- Prove It
 - Develop your main idea with vivid and specific facts, events, quotations, examples, and reasons.
- Be Specific
 - Avoid clichéd, generic, and predictable writing by using vivid and specific details
- Make it Personal
 - You should be able to give your essay anonymously to someone you know and have them know that it is you!

Do Not

- Tell Them What You think They Want to Hear
- Write a Resume
- Include information that is found elsewhere in the application
- Use 50 Words When Five Will Do
- Forget to Proofread
- Write a story that makes the admission counselor pity you; focus more about your perseverance and coping skills and how that experience made you a stronger, more resourceful person
 - **Along the same line, if you choose to write about a discrepancy in your transcript, do not make excuses. Explain the circumstances and again, focus on the positive outcome and how you “bounced back”

A GOOD ESSAY:

- Could not have been written by anyone else
- Gets into real stuff – how the author thinks and feels
- Has a unifying idea or theme
- Tells a story and/or includes concrete anecdotes
- Is written in a voice that sounds like the author
- Has a well-crafted opening line or paragraph
- Has active, specific verbs
- Avoids awkward repetition of words or phrasing
- Uses varied sentence structure (simple, compound, complex)
- Uses “I” where appropriate
- Avoids cynicism, negativity, and self-congratulations

What We Mean By “Show, Don't Tell” Or Why Anecdotes (nouns and verbs) Are Better Than Adjectives

An adjective is an abstract category. If you say that your friend is “crazy”, “zany”, or even “off-the-wall”, you have not said much. But if you describe the time she got out of her car and locked it with the keys still in the ignition, you are beginning to make progress. Or the time she got the hiccups during an assembly, couldn't stop laughing, and had to run out the back of the auditorium. The reader should be able to “become” part of your experience and see how that experience shaped you into who you are today and/or impacted your future goals.