

Tips for WRITING your COLLEGE 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 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.



Do . . . Be yourself.

If you are funny, write a funny essay. If you are serious, write a serious essay. View this as an opportunity to tell the admissions committee about who you are as a person.



Do . . . Answer the prompt.

Essays should have a clear thesis and should concentrate on a topic of significance to you. Develop your main idea with vivid, specific facts, events, quotations, or examples.



Do . . . Ask a trusted adult to review your essay & give feedback.

Allow someone to read your essay and make suggestions about how it might be improved. Consider their feedback and then edit your essay. Keep your voice, but look for ways to 1) make your introduction captivating, 2) insert more vivid language, 3) remove repetitive words, 4) eliminate unnecessary details, or 5) enhance your conclusion.



Do . . . Proofread.

Typos, spelling, or grammatical errors can be interpreted as carelessness or just bad writing. Spell Check on your computer will not catch every mistake. You must read your essay carefully and have someone else proofread it before you submit it.



Don't . . . Write a resume.

Don't include information that is found elsewhere in the application. This is not time to list your activities and achievements, but a chance to reveal your personality.



Don't . . . Tell your readers what you think they want to hear.

Don't be afraid to reveal yourself in your writing. Communicate who you are and how you think. Write thoughtfully and from your heart. It will be clear who believes in what they're saying versus those who are simply trying to say what they think admissions officers want to hear.



Don't . . . Try to take on too much.

Focus on one "most influential person," one event, or one activity. Tackling too much tends to make your essay seem watered down or disjointed. Some background information is okay, but only what is relevant to your specific story. Don't ramble just to hit a certain word count. Keep it short and to the point.



Don't . . . Forget that you are making an impression.

Don't make excuses for bad grades or breaking the rules. Don't brag, boast, or come across as arrogant. Present yourself as positive, persistent, hardworking, curious, creative and confident.

Tips for WRITING your COLLEGE ESSAY – page 2

The following is a list of Common App essay prompts that have been used in the past. These may help give you an idea of how to choose your essay topic in order to give a college admissions counselor a well rounded picture of who you are as an individual.

- Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
- The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
- Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
- Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?
- Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
- Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
- Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.