

WRITING YOUR APPLICATION ESSAY/PERSONAL STATEMENT

HOW TO WRITE YOUR COLLEGE APPLICATION ESSAY

Your application essay can be a crucial factor in your admission to the college of your choice, especially if you are marginally admissible. Above all, your essay needs to be a well-organized, clearly presented, and carefully proofread piece of your best writing.

Important points to keep in mind as you are writing your college admissions essay:

- Give yourself plenty of time to think about your topic, to outline your main ideas, and to write and rewrite rough drafts. Don't procrastinate and throw something together at the last minute! Always have a good writer (like your English teacher, not your best friend) look over your essay for spelling and grammar mistakes.
- Use your own voice and a natural writing style. Don't try to impress admissions officers with how many words you can pull from your thesaurus or how you can affect an artificial tone that you think makes you sound like someone they want to admit.
- Be honest. Don't enhance your essay with false accomplishments or life experiences that you really didn't have. Admissions officers want to admit a diverse student body with an interesting mix of students. Who you really are is more important to them than someone you "invented".
- Be careful what you write about. Expounding on your political or religious beliefs can put readers off, especially if they are "on the other side" of your issue. If you are writing about an extremely personal issue, come from the angle of how you grew as a person from that experience. Don't reveal things that will embarrass you or make your readers feel uncomfortable. Don't imply that they should admit you because you've had a miserable life and they should feel sorry for you. Don't whine.
- Do not rehash information that is listed elsewhere on your application. The essay should not be a "grocery list" of your awards, grades, and activities. Those are usually listed on another part of the college application. The personal essay is a chance to reveal who you really are as a unique person, show your special talents in their best light, and/or tell why you would be an asset to the college.
- Write about the topic that the specific college asks for in its essay instructions. Some colleges have very specific topics and can tell if you are using an essay that you wrote for another college because you were too lazy to address their topic. Some colleges use very open-ended questions that can be used for other colleges, especially if they will accept the Common Application. Read the instructions carefully before you put a lot of effort into writing an essay that is not appropriate for a particular college.
- Grab the reader's interest from your first sentence. Starting an essay with, "My name is..." or other boring beginnings can kill an overburdened reader's interest in you right away. Make your essay stand out from the pile by having a great opening.

But, what should I write about in my personal statement?

If you are given an open-ended topic such as, “Tell us about yourself” or “Write about something that is important to you”, you may feel daunted and not know where to begin. Remember, that your main objective is to reveal yourself as a person and to show admissions officers that you can write well and logically. Although some colleges have unique essay topics, many more tend to fall into a few categories such as:

*If you could have dinner (or meet, or talk) with any person in history or fiction, who would you choose and why?

*Describe one of your possessions or your room at home and explain what it says about you.

*Tell us about the one event or experience in your life that has had the greatest effect on you and explain why.

*Which person in your own life or in history has had the greatest influence on you?

*Why do you want to go to college (or to our college)?

If you have given yourself plenty of time to plan, you might consider writing an essay on each one of these topics. Even if the colleges you choose to apply to don't use these questions, it will give you practice in writing and in sorting out your feelings and ideas.

Remember that people love to hear stories. Telling a story about yourself is instantly engaging. Admissions officers know that eighteen year old seniors cannot pontificate on deep philosophical ideas--you haven't had enough life experience yet! Neither are they interested in your ideas on how to “fix” the world's problems, why they should convert to your religion, or where you went to kindergarten and elementary school. If you are going to introduce yourself, it is better to reveal yourself anecdotally than to tell your entire life story. Telling a story about a single incident that shows your character is much more effective than using generalities such as, “I have always been a good student, I am active in my community, and I am a well-rounded person.” Showing yourself in a single moment in time where you did something that you were proud of, or even where you failed miserably but learned from the experience is very compelling. To begin planning your essay, ask yourself these questions to “tune in” to yourself as a person: Whom do I most admire? What do I enjoy doing in my free time? What am I really good at? Of what accomplishment am I most proud? What are my greatest weaknesses? Why do my friends like me? What would I like to change about myself? What do I see myself doing ten years from now? How do I want to have an impact on my world? What talents would I like to acquire or enhance? What have I learned from jobs I have held? What is unique about my family? What would I like to do that I have not had the opportunity to do yet? If I had nothing holding me back, and were guaranteed success at whatever I chose to do, what would I like to do with my life?..... Why don't you do that anyway? Looking inward is the best place to start writing that essay to get you into college!

