

Writing a Successful College Admission Essay

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Writing a college admission essay can be intimidating. With some organization, you can write a top-notch essay that stands out from other applicants and tells the admissions team who you are.

A personal essay is typically 300 to 500 words in length. You may be asked to "Tell us about yourself" or "Tell us your hopes and aspirations." These topics require some thought, especially when you may be uncertain of your goals and you're trying to discover your own life and career path. The essay is a chance to demonstrate what you have discovered about yourself up to this point in your life.

The admissions team will evaluate your writing ability and the substance of your essay. After all, a very large part of your evaluation in college will be based on essays and written exams. These general tips and guidelines can help you get started:

- **Be yourself.** Choose a topic that is meaningful to you. Speak in your own voice. Write what you believe, not what you think the admissions committee wants to hear.
- **Don't bite off more than you can chew.** Don't take on too big a topic, and don't adopt a "preachy" tone. College admission officers don't want to be lectured on rainforest destruction. Instead, tell them how you became interested in environmentalism.
- **Be creative.** Pick a topic that is unique to you – be original! Remember that the people reviewing your essay will have read hundreds, if not thousands of essays. Don't give them one more "The Most Important Person In My Life" essay to read.
- **Begin and end clearly.** Reduce the introduction and conclusion to one sentence each. Try to make topics clear in a few lines and never sacrifice specifics.
- **Captivate your audience.** Your essay needs to be engaging and memorable. Draw the reader in with a quick, enticing introduction. Catch their interest and give them a reason to finish your essay.
- **Accentuate the positive.** When writing about a traumatic experience, describe but don't dwell on the negatives. Rather, explore how the experience changed you and what lessons you took away from it.
- **Leave time for drafting.** Write a first draft. Let it sit for a few days. Then review it carefully and look for both weak or dull spots and spelling and grammatical errors. Never let your first draft be your final draft. Read each draft aloud; your ears can pick up problems that your eyes may miss.
- **Revise, rewrite, reword.** Revision is the key to all good writing. It will allow you to develop your own style and organize your thoughts more clearly. Hammer your draft into shape through rewrites. Using dialogue or humorous anecdotes is almost certain to spice up your essay.
- **Ask people for input.** Have several people look over your drafts and offer their comments and suggestions. Teachers, counselors, friends, parents, siblings – ask people you respect for some candid feedback. "Does it sound confusing?" "Is it boring?" "Do I come across well?"
- **Modify your essay for different colleges.** If you have written an essay that points out a specific college or interest in a specialized major, ensure that you edit those phrases each time.