

Writing the Perfect College Essay

The essay is one of the most important parts of the college application. It is really the only way you set yourself apart from thousands of other students who have good grades, high scores, rigorous academics, and of course, numerous extracurricular activities, leadership and community service. It is your opportunity to shine, to show the college your personality and let them hear your voice! Admissions officers have shared with me that they read approximately 4 applications an hour. When they go into their “reading period” they are very skilled at what they are looking for and can easily detect an essay that may not match the rest of the application. It is critical that you write your own essay!

How to Begin – Start by brainstorming several ideas. What are you passionate about? This is NOT the time to write about your community service project that you did to help beef up your college application. Think about something that motivated you, changed you, inspired you, and frustrated you. Write about the “thing” you have been doing your whole life ... football, singing, compensating for a learning disability, babysitting your sister. Think of the time you were most proud or disappointed of yourself and what you did to accomplish that feeling. Think about the lessons learned from that experience. Some students have shown me essays where they write about a meaningful person. The problem with that is more times than not, the essay becomes about them. You can write about a person as long as you focus more on what that person meant to you, how you learned from them, and what impact that will have on your future. Some schools are very interested in hearing about what you are bringing to their campus community. Make sure you don’t throw that in as a last line or an afterthought. Doing a bit of research about the campus and how it will affect programs they already have in place is a great idea. Make sure you don’t regurgitate their website back to them!

Start Writing – The essay is usually not a one-shot, 15-minute deal. You should write several drafts and make each word count. The first draft should not be about word count, grammar, spelling or even flow. Get your thoughts out and then walk away. Make sure it is your voice and someone who knew you well would recognize it as your essay!!

Edit, Edit and Edit it Again – This is now the time to look at spelling, grammar, flow, punctuation, tenses, addressing the prompt, word count. Ask yourself, does this essay tell the story I want it to tell and is it the best reflection of who I am? This is the time to get a second and third opinion...have people who you **respect** read the essay and take their comments to heart. Remember, everyone is going to have a different opinion, so the more people you ask, the more opinions you will get.

Review One Last Time – Incorporate changes that you are comfortable making. Remember, it is your essay and you should have the final say. Try not to over think it or do any massive re-writes after you had it close to finalized. Feel confident about your essay and include it in the application.

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