

How to write a college essay

The college application essay



Writing a College Essay? Here's How:

You might be surprised to learn that the college application essay could make all the difference. In fact, it could be the deciding factor in getting into a competitive college. Nearly all colleges rate application essays as important in their admission process. The college application essay is your opportunity to show admission committees what makes you unique and stand out from other applicants. It allows you to connect with the admissions committee beyond the standard application questions. Not high school student knows how to write a college essay.

Why your essay must be outstanding

According to Marty O'Connell, executive director of Colleges That Change Lives (www.ctcl.org) says, "Students who are willing to share who they are — as a person distinct from their academic record and test scores — are the students who will stand out during the admission process." She adds, "The essay will never be used as a stand-alone criterion for admission. However, it will provide the additional insight needed to help admissions officers choose from equally talented students as they admit the class." Learning how to write a college essay can tip the scales in your favor.

Peter Van Buskirk, author of "The Admission Game" and former dean of admissions agrees and adds, "Some essays provide valuable insights into the student's academic or life experience. Others might reveal qualities such as leadership, problem solving, risk taking or social consciousness that are highly valued by given institutions." He says, "The essay can be the "mortar" in a student's application that fills in informational gaps and/or strengthens key messages that are being conveyed. While it can be the "hook" or deciding factor for some students, most fail to fully capitalize on the opportunity provided by the essay. Instead of taking the time to develop an essay that is truly insightful, they tend to produce something that is good enough to satisfy the requirement. In the competitive admission process, good enough won't cut it."

Making it memorable

Van Buskirk advises putting together a phenomenal college essay; an essay that can provide a hook for you requires a serious investment. He says it always helps to step “outside the box.” Students often feel the urge to write standard, academic essays. Boring! There is not much room for creativity or risk taking there. Students need to give energy and depth to their presentations.

“Experiment with literary devices (metaphors, narratives, etc.) and organizational tricks to engage the reader.” He adds, “A good essay will have at least two qualities: it could not have been written by anyone else and it takes the reader into some part of the student’s life experience that doesn’t appear anywhere else on the application.”

O’Connell says the essays she remembers most over 30 years allowed her to visualize a real person and their background, why they wanted to continue to learn at her college and how they would interact within the community of learners.

Learning how to write a college essay for application may seem daunting, but if you follow this process, it’s likely your application essay will be a winner and you will impress the admissions committee with your command of the written word.

Here are ten tips on how to write a college essay for application:

1. Prewriting

Give yourself the gift of time; start early and avoid procrastinating.

2. Get started

Do a self-assessment to identify who you are, what you have accomplished and where you are headed. During this prewriting, list your strengths, your unusual life experiences, how you spend your time, what are your goals are and what gets you excited.

3. Brainstorm

Take time to jot down your ideas and hone in on what makes you unique.

4. Outline

Make a rough outline after a brainstorming session where you list the points you want to make (in order) and the literary devices you will use to communicate them.

5. Be decisive

Choose a topic, issue or theme and your structure while keeping in mind the application guidelines. Decide on a single idea, focus or point of view. What is it that you want or need to get across to your audience?

6. Write

Write your essay about what you know. Keep it meaningful, introduce yourself and try to reveal your personality and character. The most compelling essays tell a story, use lots of detail, have a clear focus and are written in a conversational style.

7. Edit

Pay attention not only to what you say, but how you say it. No matter how good your story is, if it is poorly executed, you won't connect with your reader. Check for grammatical errors, punctuation and spelling. (Whatever you do, don't rely on your spell check!)

8. Evaluate

Ask yourself, is it interesting, readable, original? Does it have a compelling opening, solid middle and strong ending? Be sure every word counts and that you answer the question you are being asked.

9. Revise

Refine and polish your essay until you feel you have written the best piece you are capable of.

10. Take a break

When you think you are finished, set it aside for awhile and go back to your essay with fresh eyes. Try reading it aloud to catch awkward phrasing. Once it's polished, ask a favorite teacher, friend or your parent to proofread it and offer an honest critique