

10 COLLEGE ESSAY TIPS

To Help You with Admissions

1. ADDRESS THE PROMPT

If students make one completely preventable mistake, it's failing to address the promptness provided by the school.

Here's an example: A University's essay prompt is "Tell Us About (Mascot)." This is an awesome essay opportunity! It's a creative writer's dream, a chance to explore any number of avenues – fiction, poetry, an exploration of history, or science. The possibilities are endless but remember – there is a prompt. In the end, your essay must answer a question.

This isn't an opportunity to meander off into philosophical ramblings or to summarize your academic accomplishments. No matter the route you take, you should address the topic of the essay. In doing so, you'll show the admissions team that you understand one of the traits they're combing through students to find – the ability to follow directions!

2. BRAINSTORM AS MUCH AS YOU WRITE

Don't pick up a pen (or computer, more likely!) until you have thought about what you want to tell the college about yourself. Having trouble coming up with something? Talk to people about your essay topic like trusted school advisors, close friends, and your family, and ask them what they think is your greatest personality trait.

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3. KEEP IT PERSONAL

Most students talk about themselves in their college essays. That isn't necessarily the wrong tactic – depending on the prompt, of course. But there's more to keeping it personal than just telling the reader about you.

- This essay should sound like you. Your voice, your language. Be consistent.
- Be as specific and detailed as possible. Paint a picture. Help the reader to experience your essay with you (while keeping it concise – more on that later).
- Read your essay aloud to yourself, over and over. Read it once in the morning, and once at night. Read it aloud to somebody else. Have someone else read it to you to figure out where they stumble. As you make edits, your work will begin to sound more and more natural, and your voice and personality will emerge.

4. CHOOSE A THEME

Try to cover only some things about yourself in your college essay. Consider your best personal traits, interests, values, and goals. Focus on one of these qualities and make it the theme of your essay.

Maintaining focus will help you avoid the clichés and generalizations that can make college essays commonplace. Admissions officers aren't engaged by grand statements about life or the world, but applicants are too happy to provide those observations as evidence of maturity. This is a big pitfall, and here's the ugly truth – if you write too philosophically, you'll likely put your admissions rep to sleep.

Remember, you're addressing a reader who reads many essays yearly for a living. This isn't a person who is likely to be impressed by theories on education or observational generalizations. Keep your essay about you.

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5. USE IMAGERY AND EXAMPLES

Not everyone is a professional quality writer but adding examples and imagery to your story will help put the reader in your shoes. Instead of saying, "It was a great day," describe what about it was great - "The day was filled with energy, cheer, and crisp fall leaves." Be vivid.

6. LET IT FLOW

When writing your first draft, don't worry about grammar, vocabulary, or structure. Instead, let your ideas flow naturally and jot down everything that helps demonstrate your point. Later, you can edit your essay to ensure it's clearly communicated, properly punctuated, and filled with flowing prose. Remember, this only applies to your first draft!

7. EDIT AND PROOFREAD

After putting your ideas and thoughts on paper, it's important to go through the editing and proofreading process. This means reading your essay multiple times and considering the structure of each sentence. Look for ways to improve phrasing and run spell and grammar checks. It can also be helpful to have others read it and search for errors.

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8. BE CLEAR, CONCISE, AND DIRECT

When writing your college application essay, it's important to stay within any specified limits. If there are no guidelines provided, aim for around 500 words. Make every word count by being concise and getting straight to the point. Avoid including irrelevant information, even though you may want to showcase your personality through specific details. Keep in mind that admissions officers must read many essays, so you don't want to make their job more difficult by submitting a longer-than-needed essay.

9. ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

Students often choose to write about painful experiences. That's okay but remember to accentuate what you gained from that experience.

10. GET FEEDBACK

Have others read your essay. Ask them what they learned about you. Did you get your point across? If not, rethink your example and make so edit to your essay.