



Essays

How much do essays matter? Depending on the college, essays can matter just a little or be a very significant factor. Private colleges tend to give more significance to the essays than do the large public universities. In general, your essays are an opportunity to set yourself apart from the rest of the crowd. Admissions officers very often come down to hard choices among applicants who have virtually identical grades and test scores; in such cases the essay is apt to be the deciding factor. Keep in mind that by senior year, the essay(s) is the one thing you still have complete control over. Your test scores are what they are, and your grade point average in October or early November is what it was last June. Seize the opportunity to write a really good essay that demonstrates to an admissions committee who you are, what you care about, and why you should be on their list of students receiving acceptance letters.

When should I start my essays? As soon as possible. The Common Application doesn't change much from year to year, so start there. Even if the essay questions haven't been set yet for the colleges you plan to apply to, practice writing short pieces over the summer. You may be able to turn one or more of your efforts into one of your required essays. If you have your essays written before school starts in the fall, you can put them away for a few weeks and then revise them with fresh eyes.

What should I write about? Respond to the prompts you are given, but let your voice shine through. Some common essay questions ask you about a book, event, idea, or person who has been influential in your life. Some are quirky: "Write an essay about a hammer, a sailboat, and an orange, and how these items relate to your life." Some are straightforward: "Explain why you want to go to _____ College." Some are meant to reveal something about your personality: "Describe what you would see from your favorite window."

Can I ask for help with my essays? Parents, teachers, and peers can be helpful if asked to comment on your essays. But essays should be your work. Opinions differ as to whether or not you should ask for help with proofreading and light editing. Both Mr. Childs and Mrs. Schweber are happy to look over your essays and offer comments.

Why do I have to write essays? Colleges get lots of applications from good students. Your task is to make them see who you are, to show that you are more than your grades and test scores. Be sure to explain what you would bring to the college community, not just why you want to be a part of it, or why you would fit in.