



## Guidelines for Writing a College Application Essay

### *Role of the College Application Essay*

Admission counselors look to the essay to complete the portrait of a student. While the numbers (GPA, standardized test scores) give them an outline, admission counselors can only gain a sense of the person applying through the essay, or personal statement. Most selective colleges and universities will have a formula by which they rank applicants, but they make final decisions based upon how good a match they find between the school and an applicant: a distinctive essay can help admission committees view you as a good match for their institution.

### *Purpose of the Essay*

Keep in mind that the college essay should meet two goals:

- Show yourself as a distinctive individual
- Demonstrate that you and the school are a good match

Colleges usually send out admissions forms at the start of the school year. So, it's a good idea to come up with a few quality essay drafts so that you are not overtaxed in the fall. Although colleges change their questions every year, most places ask you to talk about one of three main topics:

- an important moment in your life
- an influential person in your life
- an influential book or movie in your life

### *Writing a Draft*

Follow these steps to write a draft in an hour, or work on each step at your own pace.

1. Recollect distinctive moments from your life and make a list: important events, enjoyable experiences, recurring memories, favorite songs or a scenes from books or movies, anything that comes to mind.
2. Pick one experience and write a full paragraph describing your thoughts, feelings, senses during this event. Be as expressive as possible, writing long sentences and using figures of speech as if you are writing a story.
3. Write a second paragraph analyzing what this scene says about you: explain why the details of this scene reveal some of your positive traits. As you start to articulate your personal

traits, refer to the “show, don’t tell principle” and start compiling other examples rather than writing long explanations.

4. Finally, write a third paragraph persuading admission counsellors why your personal traits demonstrate you would be a good match for their college. Please note that colleges are generally looking for students with the habits that accurately predict success in higher education, students who are intellectually curious, can solve problems, and works well with other.

### *Revising Your Draft*

Once admission forms are released and you have drafts with attention-getting introductions, that provide lots of examples of your distinctive character, and make the case that you are a good match for any college, it’s time to polish your essays for each school. There are three steps to take in the revision process:

1. Ideas and Organization: Make sure that the essay leads towards a main point, that each paragraph makes a clear point, and that every every example supports your point.
2. Style: Make sure that every sentence tells a mini-story, with a clear actor (subject) taking action (verb). Also make sure that each sentence contains varied sentence lengths: at least one sentence over 100 words and one sentence under 10 is a good guideline to follow.
3. Editing: No essay should never not be sent until it has been proofread for spelling and grammar errors. [caught your attention, didn’t it? This is not how you want your essay to be distinctive]

A word about additional readers. The essay is your responsibility, but every writer benefits from having people read drafts. Tell people whether you want them to offer a response to your ideas or to proofread.

### *Last Word*

Give yourself time: writing three rough drafts, revising multiple times, tailoring different essays to individual schools, and correcting errors caught by your proofreader all take time. This is not an overnight process, and so you shouldn’t start this the night before your application is due.

Write drafts of three essays over the summer before your senior year and start revising individual essays as soon as application forms are released.