

How to write a College Essay

Guidance Presentation for Careers 11 Class

Purpose

- To expose students to forms of written communication in order to effectively reach college admission goals.
 - To articulate something about you affording your personality to shine through.
 - Present yourself in a way unique to all others.
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There is no such thing as a “perfect” essay

- **The essay is a tool to demonstrate effective writing skills and explain more about yourself than your transcript reveals.**
- **Colleges do not expect you write like Keats, Hemingway, or Dickens.**
- **Be YOU, your 17/18 year old self.**
- **Newsweek article from Pomona College Dean about phenomenal errors: lunar landing or musical genius? Neil or Louie Armstrong?**



Essay Writing rules

How many pages?

- 1-2 pages.
- Think about how you read.
- Capture my attention in the first paragraph or I am not reading.
- The first line of each paragraph is impactful and powerful.
- Can you keep my attention.
- Do not bore me...I won't read.
- Remember Admissions Counselors are reading thousands upon thousands.
- How will yours stand out?

How many words?

- Common Application allows for 650 words.
- Check the rules and parameters for each college you are applying to.
- Follow those rules!
- The challenge is in writing within the parameters and word count. (Not enough words or too many)
- Write one good essay and make it work for all your applications.

Characters: There should be only one; **YOU!**



Writer

What is it that you want to share? How do you want to be perceived? How can you explain YOU in 650 words or less?



Reader

What am I learning about you? I am reading your entire application in 8 minutes or less (down from 15 minutes in 2015).



Author

YOU are the main character make sure the reader is discovering something about you



Characters/Topics

Writing about: A sporting event and it can become a play by play. An important person and it can become more about them than YOU. A service based activity and I wonder can you really compete with the organization or did you really have that ephinya tha changed your world?

Then what do colleges want?

- To learn something about you to determine how you will impact and contribute to the campus.
 - Passion: it is easier to write about something that you feel passionate about.
 - Answer the question.
 - Ability to clearly, concisely, and creatively communicate.
 - Focus.
 - Pay attention to detail.
 - Descriptive words.
 - Be Smart, likeable, individual, honest, vivid, passionate, controversial.
 - Be **YOU**.
 - You are the final editor and can determine what you want to express.
 - Know your reader and the college which can dictate the topics you can write about.
 - Paint a picture? A picture speak a thousand words.
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What colleges do NOT want!

- No profanity.
- No research paper formats, please!
- Do not use words that do not fit or are “too big” for the story. Ditch the Thesaurus. Its obvious.
- Be your wonderful teenage self. We know when an adult writes because adults write like the adults they are. Even the smartest teenagers do not “sound” like an adult.
- No discussing drugs.
- No mental health issues (Colleges accept both academically and emotionally prepared students)
- Do not try to shock the reader.
- Do not try to gain sympathy.
- Humor: if you are not funny do not but witty and clever can work.
- Religion
- Controversial Topics (Know your college)
- “Don’t be Bland” Newsweek, 2006.
<http://college-connections.blogspot.com/2007/04/college-essays-dont-be-bland.html?m=0>

What's your main message?



Review



Do you like it? Is it what you want to say? Is it your voice?

Read it over and over. Have someone else read it. Check for spelling and punctuation. Ask your reader to summarize it to ensure that your message is clear.

Essay Tips!

- Stop trying so hard!
- Do not use a thesaurus!
- Write what matters to you not to them!
- Research what is already out there for inspiration!
- Follow the rules!
- Remember to answer the question!
- Grab my attention quickly or I am not reading the rest of your essay!
- The best essays can be about the most mundane things!
- Keep it simple!
- Be YOU not something you *think* a college wants you to be!
- Research the schools you are applying to for ideas!
- Flow is important!
- Plan your topic and keep it simple!
- Dare to be different!
- Use your own voice!
- Too many reviewers and the outcome becomes a montage of different and incoherent voices!
- Proofread!
- Presentation counts. Space between paragraphs lets gives me a “rest”!