

Essays

The college essay is your opportunity to speak directly to the college admissions committee about your life, your goals, passions, values, strengths, talents, and sometimes, about the obstacles you have faced. It is here that the admissions committee evaluates the effectiveness of your writing and gains insight into the *real* person behind the data.

The essay should be well-written and carefully edited, and must be kept within the prescribed length. Consider your audience. Admissions officers read thousands of applications a year and desire to read something concise, lively, and graceful that tells them about you as a person. You should write about a topic that is important to you.

Be true to yourself. Don't think too much about what it is you believe admission officers want to hear. Where applicants commonly falter is approaching this as an academic exercise. The college application essay is often the first time that you are asked to think about your life experiences and write an essay for total purposes of acceptance.

Here a few general observations and suggestions about composing your essay:

- Begin early! You should start developing a personal statement and trying out topic ideas. Exact essay topics can be downloaded when college applications come out mid- summer, but the questions often remain the same for several years.
- Unless the college specifically asks for it, avoid the general autobiographical essay. Most essay topics are fairly open-ended, but if the question is specific, be sure you answer it.
- Think of the essay as an opportunity to add a new dimension. Avoid repeating accomplishments or activities that have been mentioned previously in your application, unless they have a bearing on the development of your character or your world perspective.
- You may be able to adapt an essay you've written for another application, or you may have to write an altogether new one. But be very careful to address the question.
- Try to avoid much-used topics (unless they are addressed in a unique way). Some examples include: Outward Bound type experiences, trips that awakened you to difference and inequality, how sports builds character, etc. On the other hand, don't go overboard in your attempts to be original, memorable, or profound.
- Avoid using the essay to apologize for some perceived inadequacy on your part. However, if there have been unusual circumstances in your life, the essay might be a good chance to explain them without making excuses.
- Avoid attempts at humor that are obscure or not funny, or experimental or stream-of-consciousness writing that may be confusing to the reader.
- Avoid anything that may appear too offbeat, cute, or elitist.
- Get feedback, a lot. Have a teachers, parents, friends, or neighbors read and critique your essay for its form and content. Does your essay effectively communicate who you are? Is the voice natural? Listen to their advice, but make the decisions that are right for you.
- Your Personal Statement/Essay should sound like it was written by you and only you.
- Spellcheck is not always your friend. It will not pick up homonyms (there/they're/their), nor will it save you from accidentally sending your Vanderbilt essay to Emory.
- Avail yourself of essay-writing workshops and opportunities.

Writing Supplements

Many colleges require supplemental essays in addition to the Common Application personal statement. The supplemental college essay(s) typically ask questions related to your interest in their

institution. In order to gain access or see the writing supplement on the Common Application (if required) you must first complete all the college specific questions in your CommonApp. Some writing supplements differ depending on the major/program you select on the school's specific page.

Essay Tips and FAQs

[College Board Essay Tips](#)

[Ten Tips from NACAC](#)