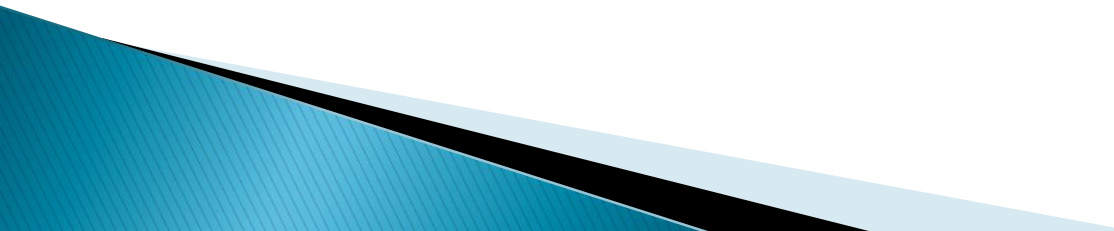


Writing a College Essay

Adapted from University of Maryland,
College Park, Office of Undergraduate
Admissions

“The goals for the student are to create essays that are authentic. Authenticity means that the essay reflects the true experiences and point of view of the writer. They aren’t fabricated to impress. They impress because of their authenticity.”

~Elizabeth Stone, The Better College Essay



Writing a College Essay: An Insider's View

Getting
Started

When Writing

Show Don't
Tell

Revisions

Advice from
the Readers

True/False

Brainstorming

Questions

Tell me your...

- Name
- Favorite food, color, hobby, sport or music

Getting Started

Start early.



Brainstorm – what is interesting to you, what is interesting *about* you?

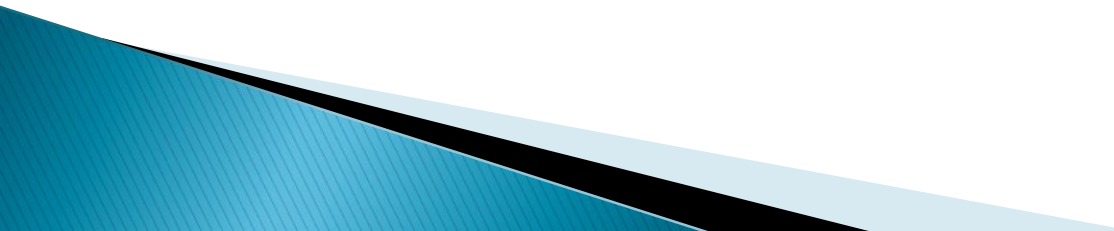


Start writing.



The topic is always “*you*”, no matter what the question is asking!

When Writing

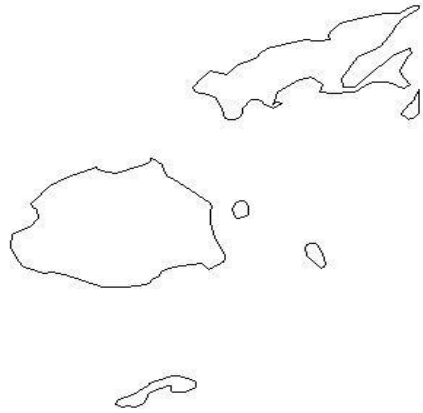
- Content is key – be specific. Remember, your audience doesn't know anything about the topic (the topic is you!).
 - Remember your audience: what is the school looking for in an applicant?
 - Revise later, write first.
 - Have writer's block?
- 

Show Don't Tell

Showing:

- Dave walked in while Brenda was hiding his birthday surprise in the drawer.
- Brenda slammed her dresser drawer shut and spun around, her hands hidden behind her back. Her lips jerked into a stiff smile. "Dave! I-I thought you wouldn't be home until six o'clock." She couldn't look him in the eyes.

Now You Try



Revisions

- Make sure you and someone else reads your college essay. **NEVER** submit an unedited college essay.
- After reading, ask yourself if you've explained everything, and if your voice is coming through clearly.
- Have clear endings and conclusions.
- Make sure *you* are the ultimate proofreader.
- Check:
 - Contractions (can't, don't, etc.)
 - Homophones : same pronunciation, different meaning (ex. to, two, too)
 - Correct references (Oops! Don't say Duke is the perfect fit for you if you are applying to UMD)

Advice from the Readers

Admissions Director, Johns Hopkins University

- “Get your pen and paper or saddle up to the word processor; the important thing to keep in mind is, don't write as if there is a correct answer. Don't be too cautious. Be adventurous intellectually--write unconventionally. Applicants have more freedom than they think, and it's in their interest to use that flexibility.”


Assistant Director of Admissions, Middlebury College

- Most students should “write what they know,” and not worry about being completely original in their subject matter. In most cases, we care more about how a student writes about a topic than the topic itself. Ideally, we love to see truly fine writing, and a topic that reveals a great deal about the applicant simply because it tells a good story.

Dean of Admissions, Northwestern University


- Answer the whole question. For example, we have a question that asks what an applicant would do with five minutes of airtime; what would you talk about and why? Kids don't answer the why part, they go on about the subject but there's no analysis, no reflection. In addition, we like writing with a natural voice. Don't be formal if you're not formal. If you're funny, be humorous. We're trying to get a sense of what you're like; stay with your natural voice.

True or False?

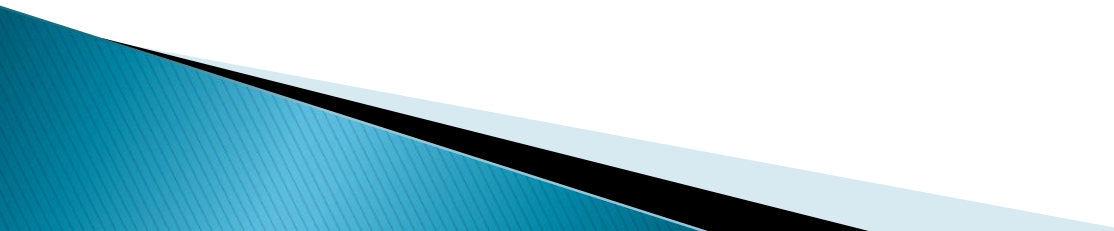
- Always wait until the last minute to write your essay. Spontaneity is attractive.
 - The purpose of the essay is to give information about you beyond GPA, test scores, recommendations and other resume information.
 - Spice up your essay with a few swear words if that's how you normally speak.
 - In the essay, it is appropriate to discuss something that is personally and sincerely important to you.
 - Try NOT to sound like a 17 or 18 year old.
 - The essay should be neat and grammatically correct.
- 

Brainstorming

Essay Topics:

- Travel experiences
 - A meaningful event
 - Academic experiences
 - Activities/Sports/Organizations
 - Future plans and goals
 - Reasons you're applying to the institution; why you would be a good fit as a student there
 - Personal information that will help the admissions committee review your file (family situation, learning difference, etc.)
- 

Brainstorming Activity

- Do you remember what you chose as your favorite food/color, etc. at the beginning of the session?
 - What does that food/color, etc. say about you?
 - How could you write a college essay about your favorite food/color, etc.? What would the Admissions Committee learn about you through hearing about your food/color, etc.?
- 

Common Application Essay Hints

1. *Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.*

An experience that speaks to your character. The boy who is incredibly patient and understanding because he grew up with a brother who is severely handicapped. The girl who came from a middle class family that lost everything....they were poor...and a few years later....became quite well off. Central to her identity is understanding that material goods are ephemeral. Understanding that family is more important than “stuff.” Etc, etc.

<http://writetocollege.com/blog/42-9-common-application-essay-hints>

Common Application Essay– Hints

2. *The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success.* Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

They don't want to hear, "I tore my ACL, I worked hard, and now I am the starting pitcher." That isn't failure. They want to know what is on the other side of failure? What lesson did you learn from failing? Did you discover that when "one door closes another opens?" Did you learn to redefine success and failure? The boy who was fourth chair violin in the 9th grade....in the 12th grade, still fourth chair violin. He stinks at the violin. He just wants to be part of the orchestra and around his friends. In his own words, "Not everyone in life gets to be the first chair violin."

Common Application Essay–

Hints

3. Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?

This is the only question that I am not happy with. I don't understand why they put this in. It almost begs for a religious answer which is of course a big NO. The only ones I ever liked was a 300lbs football player who is a vegetarian. And my favorite is from a Chinese girl who was terrible in math and science and even her Asian friends couldn't understand that. If you choose this topic, be careful that your answer isn't about being confrontational with a teacher and fighting for your point (In a disrespectful way)

Common Application Essay– Hints

4. *Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma—anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.*

Common Application Essay–

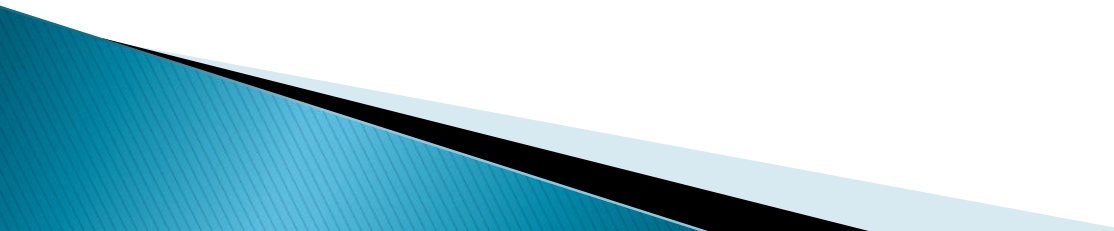
Hints

5. Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

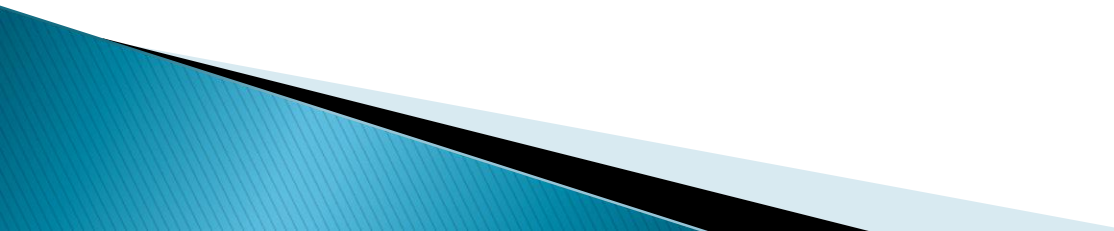
Stay far away from Bar-Mitzvahs, Confirmations, Devil-Worshipping Rituals, getting your driver's license, the ONE WEEK that you were on your own at Science Camp this summer. Taking care of a sick parent (Without sounding like "poor me"), Responsible for your car payments...gas, maintenance, insurance, etc.

My advice for years: They want to know who you are as a person: Not as a student, an athlete, a scientist or a philanthropist. These questions will get to the heart of YOU as a human being...not as a reflection of your transcripts.

LINKS TO ESSAYS THAT WORKED

- <http://www.apstudynotes.org/essays/>
 - <http://apply.jhu.edu/apply/essays/>
 - <http://www.conncoll.edu/admission/apply/essays-that-worked>
 - http://www.teenink.com/college_guide/college_essays/
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HELPFUL RESOURCES

- http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/15/opinion/sunday/frank-bruni-oversharing-in-admissions-essays.html?_r=0
 - <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays>
 - www.zeemee.com
 - <http://www.princetonreview.com/college/essay.aspx>
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Questions?

