

General College Admission Essay Tips

When You Write Your Essay...

1. Start early. Leave plenty of time to revise, reword, and rewrite. Write several drafts and revisit your essay after a few days. You can improve on your presentation.
2. Read the directions carefully. You will want to answer the question as directly as possible, and you'll want to follow word limits exactly. Express yourself as briefly and as clearly as you can.
3. Tell the truth about yourself. The admission committee is anonymous to you; you are completely unknown to it. Even if you run into a committee member in the future, he/she will have no way of connecting your essay (out of the thousands read) to you.
4. Focus on an aspect of yourself that will show your best side. You might have overcome some adversity, worked through a difficult project, or profited from a specific incident. A narrow focus is more interesting than broad-based generalizations.
5. Go beyond writing about an impacting event, achievement, greatest asset, etc. Add reflection and tell why this made you who you are or changed you.
6. Tie yourself to the college. Be specific about what this particular school can do for you. Your essay can have different slants for different colleges.
7. Speak positively. Negatives tend to turn people off.
8. Write about your greatest assets and achievements, but balance with humility.
9. Proofread! Your essay should be free of typos and grammar errors. Use more than spell check. Your computer may miss words that are spelled correctly but out of context.
10. Share your essay with your AVID teacher and/or counselor. Have them edit and give you suggestions.

But...

1. **DON'T** repeat information given elsewhere on your application. The committee has already seen it—and it looks as though you have nothing better to say.
2. **DON'T** write on general, impersonal topics—like the nuclear arms race or the importance of good management in business. The college wants to know about you.
3. **DON'T** use the college essay to excuse your shortcomings. (It would give them additional attention.)
4. **DON'T** use clichés.
5. **DON'T** go to extremes: too witty, too opinionated, or too “intellectual.” Be yourself.
6. **DON'T** plagiarize. College admissions representatives have electronic means of verifying whether your essay is written by you or if you copied someone else. Plagiarizing is the quickest way of ruining all chances of admission.

Remember:

- The college essay is **YOURS**. If it looks like Madison Avenue, the admission committee will probably assume that it is your mother's or your father's (or another adult's) work.
- A “gimmick” essay rarely goes anywhere. The committee may be amused but unimpressed with your candidacy.
- Write a serious essay, from the bottom of your heart, in the most mature manner possible.