

Overview:

The college application essay is not a piece of prose or a business proposal - it is an interview in essay form. Many students agree that writing the college admissions essay is the most challenging part of the college application. The essay is important - after considering first the academic record, and then the SAT or ACT scores, the essay is the next opportunity the admissions official has to consider a student for acceptance.

The essay says, "I am a good fit for this college, and I can communicate in a way that is consistent with my education." Since the essay is not a timed response, it should be error-free and clear. It should be edited and read by a parent or other adult, but not written or re-mastered by anyone other than the college applicant.

Assignment:

In responding to your choice of college application essay prompt or prompt for GSP or GSA, compose a personal essay *that meets the word count* of your chosen prompt.

Please include a coversheet on which you type the prompt, identify the college from which the prompt comes, and your name. If you already have a college in mind, use its prompt instead, but include that prompt, and the college from which it comes, on the coversheet.

What to write:

Choose a topic that reflects you. Imagine you are in an interview, what question do you wish the interviewer would ask you? What would you love to talk about? Your work at an animal shelter? The beta testing you did for a new video game? The campout you went on with your best friends? Write about it! The essay is the best way to tell the admissions board the interesting things about you. You are the person who can describe yourself best; real examples from your life are interesting to the reader.

If you can't think of anything to write, write about one of the activities in the activities list you will include with your application. Be sure that you are telling why the activity is so important to you, why you stayed committed, and why you spent so much time participating. For the long essay (500 words or more) be sure to choose one topic only. If it is possible, make that topic something that will relate to your intended college major or future career interests. Tell it like it is, but follow proper essay format. Start with your main idea (response to the essay prompt), keep the examples in the body, and the attitude at the end.

Stay on topic - that is what editing is for. Your examples don't have to be unique, thought provoking, or even exciting, they just have to be sincere. If you are relating a sad or tragic personal experience, use less than one hundred words to describe the experience (for a short essay, keep the description to a minimal). Focus on the positive outcome or lesson you learned.

Remember, this essay represents you to the college. Don't give the mistaken impression of you as a "broken person." A college may hesitate to admit a student who has emotional problems that may hinder his education. So, if your examples relate a negative experience, keep it short and near the beginning so you can highlight the positive outcome of your struggle and leave the reader with your positive attitude. Focus on your triumph.

How to begin:

Read the essay prompts and discuss your ideas with a good listener. Choose your examples and how you will present them to support your main idea. Determine your conclusion so you are sure to write each example with the correct goal and tone in mind.

Write as much as is possible in an hour, focusing only on content. Work on clarity and style at another time, since it may be difficult to edit and rework sentences during the creative process. At another time, read the essay aloud, cut out redundancies and unclear wording. Rework sentences and leave out anything that does not relate to the main idea and final attitude. Expressing one idea clearly is more effective than a flood of words and ideas.

You are in control of this interview - keep to the point you want to make. Avoid listing small details that distract from your point. Consider when you have told a story and the listener keeps asking you questions about small details. You get frustrated because you feel he is missing the point of your anecdote. In the same way, too many small details only distract the reader from your point. Keep the examples moving towards your main idea.

Some Dos:

- Speak in the first person - this is you talking. Use "I". Don't use "you" to describe yourself and your experiences and feelings.
- Allow enough time to read the essay many times.
- Edit. Write and rewrite to ensure clarity. Cut details that confuse or add nothing.
- Read your essay aloud to hear it and see how it flows. Make sure it is your voice.
- Ask others to read your essay and give their feedback. Ask that the feedback be constructive, such as; "I would love an example of that"; "What happened next?"; "This part confused me." Ask the reader how he felt after reading the entire essay. His attitude will most likely be the same as the reader in the admissions office. Revise the ending to elicit the response you desire.
- With help, fix misspellings, errors and unclear writing. Ensure that your style and personality is represented, but don't allow errors.

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Absolute no-no's: On par with shooting yourself in the foot

- Embellishing the facts. Much like plagiarizing, embellishing or inventing your history is both unethical and unhealthy. Living a lie is too much work because you have to remember all the lies you have told. The truth is eminently memorable. Present it in your writing on college application essays.

- Not answering the prompts. Although you may have some fantastic things to say, keep your comments to the point. Think of yourself as your own press secretary during the application process. If the President's press secretary just decided to spout off about his favorite movies when reporters asked about the U. S.'s Middle East policy, he would appear both foolish and damaging to the administration. Keep your reporters happy and well-informed, not confused.
- Wordiness. If you write incredibly long sentences or paragraphs that become run-on sentence and bore the admissions officers, you may not hold the attention of your most important audience and that would not be good. No, it wouldn't. No. No. No. Keep the admissions officers from diving headfirst into their coffee cups.
- The "SHIFT + F7" syndrome. Also known as the "thesaurus tick," it involves students' proclivities to utilize polysyllabic dictums in order to manifest a latent brilliance that would never emerge without irreparably altering every third word that does not consist of three syllables. Admissions officers will be impressed to meet you, not your thesaurus. !
- Self-contradictions. It is vital to maintain consistency within your essay. You lose your trustworthiness in introducing yourself to admissions officers.
- Talking glowingly about your boyfriend or girlfriend. Dissing them in your application would not make sense either. College admissions officers generally have little interest in your love life and see such discussions as a sign of immaturity.
- Overt criticism of your school or upbringing. Many individuals worldwide would feel blessed to have enjoyed the same opportunities you have had. Furthermore, tired and overloaded admissions officers don't want to join your pity party.
- Name-dropping. If you are concerned about world peace, that's great. We recommend that you not toss in ideas about which you are only marginally concerned in order to sound better rounded. Name-dropping should stay in the realm of cocktail parties.
- Clichés. "I want to improve the condition of the Everyman... " You may be a willing future Peace Corps volunteer, but six other clowns wrote the exact same thing and don't really mean it. Who should the admissions officer heed? Make your words authentic and thus *yours*.