



Tips for Writing College Application Essays

From someone who has been in your shoes

Congratulations! You've decided where you want to apply for college. Maybe you've even completed most of your application. Now all that remains is the often-dreaded application essay, but no need to fear! We are here to answer some of the most common questions about college application essays and provide some guidance for writing a strong essay.

What is an Application Essay?

You may hear it referred to as an application essay, an admissions essay, or a personal essay, but at its core an application essay is a common tool college and university admissions teams use to help determine what candidates they will accept into their institution. The application essay is typically located near the end of the application and might contain questions pertaining to the school's values or ask the applicant to share about themselves for the admissions team to get a more holistic view of the applicants.

Why is it important?

Application essays can be a key determinant in whether or not an applicant is accepted. The application essay is a chance to set yourself apart from the other applicants and highlight what makes you the right fit for their institution.

In a holistic review, the application essays help admissions reviewers get a better sense of who you are as a person – beyond your grades, coursework, and test scores. Essays provide important insight into what you're passionate about, what challenges have you faced, and how going to college supports your dreams, goals, and career interests.

What to avoid

- Using slang, swear words, & generally non-academic language
- Submitting without proof-reading
- Plagiarizing or telling a story that is not your own
- Being too vague or relying on cliches
- "sob stories"
- Forgetting to change the college or university name you are applying to





The
road
from
rural to
college-
ready!

What to strive for

The purpose of a college essay is to showcase who you are outside of your academic achievements. Think of a time that you overcame adversity, challenged what you once believed, or achieved a personal goal. Make sure to highlight your personal assets and show a growth mindset as college is all about welcoming new experiences.

Tips for writing a successful essay

- You know yourself best! Write from the heart and let your voice shine through.
- Try writing practice sample essays before your final essay.
- Give yourself plenty of time for writing and re-writing.
- Research the school's values and mission statement ahead of time and find ways to incorporate their ideals into your essay.
- Read the prompt more than once and make sure you are sticking to it.
- Try to stay within the word or page limit. Strike a balance between being concise and fleshing out the most important details of your story.
- Now is not the time to be humble, brag about yourself! Share what makes you unique!
- Ask more than one person to proofread for clarity and errors.

Pro-Tip!

These essays are often used to identify students who are eligible for certain scholarships and other financial aid, beyond the FAFSA and scholarship applications. They wouldn't know you were eligible otherwise. That's why it's important that you include on your admissions application or in the essay – wherever it makes – information about being a rural student. Do your parents have a farm? Write about it! Are you very involved in your rural community? Write about that! This is your opportunity to showcase your rural identity!

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