

Write your college essay

The admission essay is an important part of any college application. Some schools give more weight to the essay than others, but if an essay is required, you can bet it's going to be used in the admissions decision to some degree. Even if you have a high GPA, the essay provides an easy way for you to distinguish yourself from the other thousand applicants who have similar grades and activities as you. Writing an admissions essay that works will increase your chances of being accepted. To help you out, we have put together this easy list of do's and don'ts for writing your essay.

I once had a student that had perfect scores in math; all courses in high school were 100% and the math sections of all state and national tests were near perfect. That student wrote about their love for math. As an admissions counselor, I could have inferred from the transcript and test scores that the student loved math or at least was brilliant in the subject. That's all I knew about the applicant and while his grades stood out and his essay matched, I was left not knowing anything else about the applicant. The essay is an opportunity to shine, tell a story and it's where you can bring your application to life.

Make a List

Do: Make a list of your positive qualities, strengths, personality characteristics and traits. What makes you unique? What makes you think? What makes you content? Have you experienced failure? Has a belief been changed? Use this list to narrow the focus of your topic.

Don't: Don't choose offensive topics. Topics that may be offensive are those that surround religion, racism and even personal opinions on world issues. You won't be doing yourself any favors if your essay leaves the admissions officer feeling offended or worse, angry.

Focus!

Do: Your topic should be specific. Your essay itself should have three parts - an introduction, body and a conclusion. Create an outline, decide what examples you want to include and write your first draft. Don't worry about making the first draft perfect. Get your thoughts on paper. You can refine it later! Remember that this is a process that may take some time and several revisions.

Don't: Don't just create a list. Your goal should not be to include all of your accomplishments and activities (that is what an activities resume is for). The most engaging essays tell a story and have a clear focus. A thoughtful and detailed narration of a difficult time in your life tells more about you than a list of competitions won and honors achieved.

Be Creative

Do: This is your time to shine! Identify a topic or talk about something that is unique and different. Or, breathe life into a mundane subject by approaching it differently.

Don't: Do what my former student did (see story above).

Get Feedback!

Do: Write multiple drafts of your essay and have it reviewed by a fellow student and also by a parent, relative or teacher. This will help you ensure the topic has been covered. Write as well as you can, edit as needed. Finally, know the essay word limit and stick to it.

Don't: Write a novel. Essays that stick to the requirements and are positive are easier and fun to read.