

The College Essay

“Find a subject you care about and which you in your heart feel others should care about.” -Kurt Vonnegut

What admissions officers look for...

- YOU – The person behind the GPA, the test scores, the extra-curricular activities - the “you” that you have not revealed in the rest of your application. BE YOURSELF!
- SURPRISE – An unexpected angle on your topic—even if the experience you are writing about is ordinary.
- GENUINENESS- Write as yourself relying on your own vocabulary.
- THOUGHTFULNESS – Think about your experience and its meaning. Take the time to go beyond the obvious. Write thoughtfully and from your heart.

... And how to help them find it

- THINK ABOUT WHO YOUR AUDIENCE IS - Make your essay stand out. Think about how many essays these admissions officers are reading.
- THINK ABOUT YOUR PURPOSE – Don’t try to sell yourself but be yourself.
- FOCUS – Instead of generalizing yourself, be as specific as you can be.
- USE PRECISE AND ECONOMICAL LANGUAGE
- GIVE YOUR ESSAY MOMENTUM – Make the parts of the essay work together to make your point.
- USE CORRECT GRAMMAR, SPELLING, AND PUNCTUATION – PROOFREAD, PROOFREAD, PROOFREAD! Don’t distract the reader from what you’re writing by writing it incorrectly.

Here’s What Admissions Officers Want to Find...

- Clarity and originality of thought
- Maturity
- Consistency in use of language
- Applicants willing to give a window into their personality, values, and character
- Demonstration of writing skills
- Ability to organize thoughts
- Something new that can be gleaned about the applicant’s individuality through the choice of topic and its development
- Brevity – Keep your writing short and to the point; stay within the length suggested
- A distinct beginning and ending, with a thoughtful essay in between.

Here’s What Admissions Officers Hate...

- Big words that are meant to impress.
- Sloppiness, mechanical errors (spelling, punctuation), obvious professional input, reference to an incorrect institution.
- Poor writing and flimsy content
- Students who are scripted—many have ill-conceived ideas of what will impress an admissions committee
- Lack of candor, writing in third person, and writing that conveys little of the applicant’s personality
- Cliches
- Merely putting your activity lists into prose form—and thereby missing a chance to tell something new and interesting about yourself
- Bland, impersonal writing

- Excessive length
- Doom and gloom essays
- Essays that do not answer the question

**Consider the following two assessment rubrics for college essays: College Personal Essay
CriteriaContent**

- Does the essay answer the question(s)?
 - Is the essay interesting?
 - Is there information about you as an individual (not just your wants and hopes)?
 - Does the reader get some insights into you as a person?
 - Is there evidence of depth of understanding?

 - **Student's Writing Style**
 - Is the essay as a whole logically structured?
 - Is there an introductory sentence in each paragraph relating the paragraph to your thesis?
 - Is there a variety of grammatically correct sentence structures (using question marks, semi-colons, dashes, and parentheses)?
 - Is word choice precise?
 - Are mechanics (including spelling _____, usage _____) standard?
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