Workshop Description: This workshop is an introduction to writing your personal statement for your college applications; you may have also heard this called your college essay. Writing your Personal Statement is your chance to let colleges know who you are, based upon your experiences, academic career and other co-curricular accomplishments. This is an opportunity to show that you’ve reflected upon your experiences to date and though about how your experiences have helped you to develop your life goals and what role education will play in accomplishing them.

Workshop Goals and Outcomes: We want you to leave this workshop with a working outline that will be the start of your Personal Statement. You will select a prompt from a college of your choice. This workshop is just the beginning of the work that you will do on your personal statement over the summer months so that you are prepared to complete your college applications in the fall.

Workshop Expectations and Behaviors: Please use the resources in your binder as you start work on your personal statement. Feel free to make notes in the margins and highlight to help you remember important information. As always when in class, cell phones and MP3 players must be turned off. Please respect and support your fellow classmates as they participate in classroom discussion.

Workshop Assignment(s): Work to complete the Personal Statement outline worksheet in your CSF Scholars binder.

Passport Assignment: Complete basic components of the Personal Statement outline worksheet.

Materials: Pen, highlighter, CSF Scholars Passport, Premier Planner Agenda

Text: CSF Scholars Binder 2010, College Success Foundation
PERSONAL STATEMENT OUTLINE

An essay is a group of paragraphs about one subject. Essays are similar to paragraphs in that they both have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Both explain one main idea with details, facts, and examples. An essay is longer because it contains more ideas. In an essay the introductory paragraph opens the essay and tries to catch the reader's interest. It uses a thesis statement (or topic sentence) which is one sentence that states the main idea of the entire essay. Then the body of an essay consists of several paragraphs, each one making a different point about the main idea, but all supporting the main idea, sometimes by using examples. Use the last paragraph as the conclusion to bring your essay to a close, or wrapping up your thoughts.

Writing the thesis statement – what is your main point, opinion, or angle that the rest of the essay will support and discuss? Try to be specific, use more exact words, explain yourself, use natural divisions, don’t announce what you are going to say, just say it.

Generating ideas for the body – must fully support and discuss your thesis statement. When you composed your thesis statement, you probably already thought about what the body will contain. Use a prewriting method – brainstorming, freewriting, clustering, or asking questions – to generate ideas for the body.

Organizing Ideas into an Outline – even a rough outline will help you stay on track and saves time later. It needs to include 2 to 4 main ideas to support the thesis statement, 2 o 4 topic sentence stating these ideas, a plan for each paragraph, a logical order in which to present paragraphs.

Introduction and thesis statement 

Topic sentence for body paragraph #1
Topic sentence for body paragraph #2

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Topic sentence for body paragraph #3

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Conclusion:

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Writing Your College Essay

Why do colleges want an essay?

The rest of your college application lets the college know what you’ve done. The college essay lets the college know who you are. It shows that you’ve thought about your life after high school and created some goals.

The essay also is a sample of your writing ability. The college is looking not only at the content but also the quality of your writing. A large part of performance in college is based on written products and they want to see if you are ready.

What types of essay questions might the college ask?

The ‘tell us about yourself’ question. The school wants to know you better and wants you to reveal your personality. They want to know your creativity, sense of humor, organization, and thought processes. They are looking for examples of your preferences and values.

The ‘why did you choose this college’ question. They want to know if you have well thought out goals for your future and how their college will help you achieve them.

The ‘tell us about’ question. This question will look at your creativity and knowledge. It might ask about your opinion of world events, family, personal preferences, etc. This question must be focused and well organized. They are looking at your thought processes.

How do I write the essay?

Prewrite – Collect and organize your ideas. Brainstorm. Write down as many ideas about yourself as you can. You can always eliminate ones that don’t fit later. Include personal characteristics as well as places you’ve been and accomplishments. Ask friends and relatives to help you cover all your characteristics.

Organize – Make sure the essay topic is clear. Look for connections in the information you brainstormed so you can group ideas together. Create a topic sentence.

Draft – Write the essay in three parts – 1. Introduction (tell the reader what the essay is going to be about). 2. Body (information about your topic sentence). This is the part that answers the essay question. 3. Conclusion (briefly recaps information in the body and topic sentence).

Edit – Reread the essay, have others read it. Read it out loud and see how it sounds when spoken. Look for errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, clarity, and organization. Make sure you can find your main idea and follow it from beginning to end. Use facts, quotes, and evidence if you are proving a point. Don’t make it too long or too short – make every word count. Don’t include information found in your application somewhere else. Make it YOU!

Rewrite – This is the final step and one last chance to edit. Always type your essay. Make sure you have followed all directions and note the deadline date.

Good luck writing your college essay!
Checklist for Writing a Personal Essay:

☐ READ AND FOLLOW ALL DIRECTIONS!
  • Specific font size?
  • Minimum or maximum number of words?
  • My statement responds specifically to the question being asked.

☐ What’s special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story?
  • Details of your life (personal or family problems, history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals)
  • What are your career goals?

☐ Explain gaps or discrepancies in your academic record

☐ Are unusual obstacles or hardships (such as economic, familial, or physical) you’ve had to overcome in your life appropriate to your prompt?

☐ What personal characteristics (for example: integrity, compassion, persistence) do you possess that would improve your prospects for success in the field or profession?

☐ What skills (for example, leadership, communicative, analytical) do you possess?

☐ What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?

General Advice
Make the personal statements to each school unique and specific to their prompt.

☐ Tell a story
  • Think in terms of showing or demonstrating through concrete experience. One of the worst things you can do is to bore the admissions committee.

☐ Find an angle
  • Find a “hook” or angle for your life story to make it interesting and give it a little drama.

☐ Be specific and concise
  • Give specific reasons for your desire to go to college. Use experiences that you’ve had that may have motivated you. Your application should emerge as the logical conclusion to your story.

☐ Do some research, if needed?
  • If a school wants to know why you’re applying to it rather than another school, do some research to find out what sets your choice apart from other universities or programs. If the school setting would provide an important geographical or cultural change for you, this might be a factor to mention.
Concentrate on your opening paragraph
- The lead or opening paragraph is generally the most important. It is here that you grab the reader’s attention or lose it. This paragraph becomes the framework for the rest of the statement.

Tell what you know
- The middle section of your essay might detail your interests and experiences. Be as specific as you can be. Refer to experiences (work, research, etc.) classes, conversations, books you’ve read, seminars you’ve attended, or any other source of specific information about college and/or a career path and why you’re suited to it. Since you will have to select what to include in your statement, the choices you make are often an indication of your judgment.

Write well and correctly
- Be meticulous. Type and proofread your essay very carefully. Express yourself clearly and concisely. Stick to stated word limits. Use correct grammar, punctuation and spelling.

Use YOUR vocabulary.
- A thesaurus is a handy tool but don’t use unnecessarily large words.

Reread the prompt and directions while you are writing to make sure you’re still answering the question.

Avoid clichés
- An applicant who writes that he is wants to go to college so he can get a better job is not exactly expressing an original thought. Stay away from often-repeated or tired statements.

Avoid trying to be funny, cute, sarcastic or cynical.
- Speak honestly, clearly and from your heart. Others may not understand your wit.

Before you SEND

Proof, proof, proof - make appropriate changes
Ask two other people to proof read it for you - make appropriate changes
Have someone read it to you out loud - make appropriate changes
Make appropriate changes.
Check each box.
Be mindful of the appearance of the final document before you SEND.
Washington State Schools
Essay Questions

Central Washington University

The following questions are required to be answered by:
Freshmen applicants with a cumulative high school GPA of 3.0 or less, or those who are missing any core
high school courses (4 years of English, 3 years of Math, 3 years of social sciences, 2 years of science, 2
years of foreign language).

• How have your past experiences influenced your academic record?
• What are you presently doing to ensure your academic success?
• What are your academic goals and how will CWU help you accomplish these goals?

You are encouraged to include your involvement and leadership contributions, in your home, school, or
community in your essay. Please write your essay on a separate sheet(s) of paper and attach to this
application. Include your first and last name and date of birth on each sheet of paper.

Eastern Washington University

Eastern Washington University seeks to better understand the contributions, qualifications and talents of
our students beyond test scores and high school grades. Please address your experience(s) in each category
keeping in mind how they highlight the contributions you will make to the EWU campus community. We ask that you
respond to each of the following six questions and limit your answers to 100 words per question.

• Describe examples of your leadership experience in which you have significantly influenced
others, helped resolve disputes or contributed to group efforts over time. Consider responsibilities
to initiatives taken in or out of school.
• Describe any of your special interests and how you have developed knowledge in these areas.
  Give examples of your creativity; the ability to see alternatives; take diverse perspectives; come
  up with many, varied or original ideas; or willingness to try new things.
• Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to address
  this challenge. Include whether you turned to anyone in facing that challenge, the role that
  person played, and what you learned about yourself.
• Explain what you have done to make your community a better place to live. Give examples of
  specific projects in which you have been involved over time.
• Describe your experiences facing or witnessing discrimination. Tell us how you responded and
  what you learned from those experiences and how they have prepared you to contribute to the
  EWU community.
• Articulate the goals you have established for yourself and your efforts to accomplish them. Give
  at least one specific example that demonstrates your work ethic/diligence.

Evergreen State College

Personal Statement (desired). International applicants are required to submit a response. Your response
should be as thorough and complete as possible, but limit your answer to two (2) pages.

Please provide us with information about your academic preparation and why you feel you’re ready for
college-level studies at Evergreen. In addition, you should describe your educational and career goals and
how you believe attending The Evergreen State College will help you reach them.
**Gonzaga University**

Please write an essay (250 words minimum) on a topic of your choice or on one of the options listed below. Please indicate your topic by checking the appropriate box. This personal essay helps us become acquainted with you as a person and student, apart from courses, grades, test scores, and other objective data. It will also demonstrate your ability to organize your thoughts and express yourself.

1) Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
2) Discuss some issue of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you.
3) Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.
4) Describe a character in fiction, a historical figure, or a creative work (as in art, music, science, etc.) that has had an influence on you, and explain that influence.
5) A range of academic interests, personal perspectives, and life experiences adds much to the educational mix. Given your personal background, describe an experience that illustrates what you would bring to the diversity in a college community, or an encounter that demonstrated the importance of diversity to you.
6) Topic of your choice.

Attach your essay to the last page on a separate sheet(s) (same size please). You must put your full name, date of birth, and name of secondary school on each sheet.

**Section IV:** Please respond to the following short answer questions in 3 to 5 sentences.

1. What has been your most significant failing, and what did you learn from the experience?
2. Please read and reflect on the following quotation from Pedro Arrupe, S. J.: "What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the mornings, what you will do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, who you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything." What seizes your imagination?

**Pacific Lutheran University**

The essay allows the admission committee to get to know you as a person, as well as to evaluate your writing ability. The essay is a great way to understand you beyond your test scores and grades. Please choose from the following admission essay options and check the box of the option you have selected.

Option 1: PLU encourages students to consider the question raised by the poet, Mary Oliver: "What will you do with your one wild and precious life?" What hopes and plans do you have for your future at PLU and how will you use your unique skills, passions and experiences to make a positive contribution to campus and your life after college?*

Option 2: Please submit your college application essay on a topic of your choice.*

Option 3: Please use my SAT Writing Sample as my essay for admission. (Please note that you will need to submit official SAT scores to PLU in order to have your SAT writing sample evaluated for admission.)

SAT Essay ID (if known)_______________________

* Applicants competing in the Regents’ and President’s Scholarship process must answer option 1. This essay will be considered for admission to the university and the scholarship competition. For both options 1 and 2, please submit your essay on a separate piece of paper. Please type or print legibly, and include your name and birth date on each page.
Seattle Pacific University

Please read the statement below describing “SPU: A Premier Christian University” and thoughtfully respond to the questions below. Your answers will provide us with a more personal assessment of you and how you might benefit from an education at SPU. Answer the questions concisely and in your own words. **Please type essays. Each essay must be answered in at least 300 words.**

At Seattle Pacific University, we believe that the finest education is informed by Christian faith in action. We want our students to:

• become people who know and understand what’s going on in the world;
• fully embrace the Christian story, becoming biblically and theologically educated;
• experience rigorous learning in a vibrant intellectual community;
• be part of the grace-filled community here, one that practices radical reconciliation; and
• become graduates of competence and character, equipped to change the world.

Why is that important to you? Because you will enter a world beyond Seattle Pacific that desperately needs what you will have to offer. We want your experience at SPU to challenge you to think, to grow, and to act so that you can dive into the world’s complexities, needs, and opportunities. We call that engaging the culture and changing the world. As a premier Christian university, we do this by graduating people of competence and character, by pursuing the kind of scholarship that brings light and understanding into the world, and by modeling a grace-filled community. The Seattle Pacific community will provide you with both freedom and support as you grapple with difficult questions. Our goal is to help make you more effective in your career, your community, your church, and your family. You will be taught by world-class scholars, who will engage you in learning—about the world and the relevance of the Christian story both to the world and to your academic discipline. You will also participate with your professors and classmates in active learning and engagement in Seattle and around the world.

Our faculty and staff are followers of Christ. They share essentials of faith and are committed to an educational experience for you that includes an exploration of Christianity. While embracing Christianity is not a requirement for admission to Seattle Pacific University, every student is expected to be involved in some exploration of the Christian faith during their time at SPU. This exploration includes opportunities for worship, faculty-led small groups, forums on current issues, and urban and worldwide ministry. All full-time undergraduate students must meet Seattle Pacific’s community chapel requirement.

Students are also asked to adhere to community standards of behavior. They are expected to refrain from academic cheating; sexual immorality; use of tobacco, alcohol or illegal drugs; and participation in acts of racial or sexual harassment. These standards are intended to show respect for SPU’s Christian tradition and for other community members.

Please join Seattle Pacific in this worthwhile venture to engage the culture and change the world.

The application process is your opportunity to help us better understand your qualifications for admission to Seattle Pacific University. Please introduce yourself to us in a personal statement. You can also use this statement to explain any inconsistencies in your application.

Seattle Pacific University is a Christian university, and while we don’t require a profession of Christian faith for admission, we seek to admit students who will best succeed in and benefit from a Christian learning environment. Please describe your own religious beliefs and why you believe that SPU is a fit for you.

Seattle Pacific University has a clear purpose: to equip graduates who have the competence, character, and courage to engage the culture and change the world. Please respond to this statement of SPU’s purpose by choosing one of the following essay questions to answer:

a) Describe occasions when you have engaged the culture around you.

b) Describe your background and the cultural influences that have shaped who you are today. (Cultural influences may include where you are from, your family, your ethnic background, your life experiences, etc.)
Saint Martin’s University

Submit a one-page essay with this application responding to one of the following questions:

1) Saint Martin's urges its students to “be the spirit.” Tell us about a person (actual or fictional) whose spirit inspires you and explain why.

2) A Saint Martin's education helps students to be challenged, be encouraged, be passionate, and be brilliant, among other qualities. What do you hope Saint Martin’s can help you be?

Seattle University

Please write an essay (250 words minimum) on a topic of your choice or on one of the options listed below. Please indicate your topic by checking the appropriate box. This personal essay helps us become acquainted with you as a person and student, apart from courses, grades, test scores, and other objective data. It will also demonstrate your ability to organize your thoughts and express yourself.

1) Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
2) Discuss some issue of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you.
3) Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.
4) Describe a character in fiction, a historical figure, or a creative work (as in art, music, science, etc.) that has had an influence on you, and explain that influence.
5) A range of academic interests, personal perspectives, and life experiences adds much to the educational mix. Given your personal background, describe an experience that illustrates what you would bring to the diversity in a college community, or an encounter that demonstrated the importance of diversity to you.
6) Topic of your choice.

Attach your essay to the last page on a separate sheet(s) (same size please). You must put your full name, date of birth, and name of secondary school on each sheet.

Why do you feel that Seattle University is a good match with your educational goals?

University of Puget Sound

Please write an essay (250 words minimum) on a topic of your choice or on one of the options listed below. Please indicate your topic by checking the appropriate box. This personal essay helps us become acquainted with you as a person and student, apart from courses, grades, test scores, and other objective data. It will also demonstrate your ability to organize your thoughts and express yourself.

1) Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
2) Discuss some issue of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you.
3) Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.
4) Describe a character in fiction, a historical figure, or a creative work (as in art, music, science, etc.) that has had an influence on you, and explain that influence.
5) A range of academic interests, personal perspectives, and life experiences adds much to the educational mix. Given your personal background, describe an experience that illustrates what you would bring to the diversity in a college community, or an encounter that demonstrated the importance of diversity to you.
6) Topic of your choice.

Short answer section

On a separate sheet of paper, briefly discuss each of the following in 300 words or less:

a. Why are you interested in University of Puget Sound?
b. Write the name of the secondary school teacher who has had the greatest positive impact on you academically. Explain why you have listed this individual as a teacher of influence.
1. Personal Statement (Required)

The Personal Statement is our best means of getting to know you and your best means of creating a context for your academic performance. When you write your personal statement, tell us about those aspects of your life that are not apparent from your academic record. Tell us about the experiences that don't show up on your transcript:

- a character-defining moment,
- the cultural awareness you've developed,
- a challenge faced,
- a personal hardship or barrier overcome.

Directions: Choose either A or B. Recommended length: 500-650 words

Discuss how your family's experience or cultural history enriched you or presented you with opportunities or challenges in pursuing your educational goals.

OR

Tell us a story from your life, describing an experience that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it.

Tips

Some of the best statements are written as personal stories. We welcome your imaginative interpretation.

You may define experience broadly. For example, in option B, experience could be a meeting with an influential person, a news story that spurred you to action, a family event, or something that might be insignificant to someone else that had particular meaning for you. If you don't think that any one experience shaped your character, don't worry. Simply choose an experience that tells us something about you.

2. Short Response (Required)

Directions: Choose one of the following two topics and write a short essay. Maximum length of 250 words.

The University of Washington seeks to create a community of students richly diverse in cultural backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints. How would you contribute to this community?

Describe an experience of cultural difference or insensitivity you have had or observed. What did you learn from it?

Tip

You may define culture broadly in Topic #2. For example, it may include ethnicity, customs, values, and ideas, all of which contribute to experiences that students can share with others in college. As you reply to this question, reflect on what you have learned – about yourself and society – from an experience of cultural difference.

Additional Comments (optional)

Is there anything else you would like us to know about you?

Directions: Use this section for anything you wish to express that doesn't seem to fit in any of the required writing areas. For example, if you have experienced personal hardships in attaining your education, if your activities have been limited because of work or family obligations, or if you want us to know how important something really is to you, tell us here.

Format

Spelling, grammar, and punctuation are considered.

If you're applying online, do your writing in a word processing program such as Word, then copy and paste into the window provided. Double-spacing, italics, and other formatting will be lost, but this will not affect the evaluation of your application.

Proffreed, proofreed, PROOFREAD!
**Washington State University**

We invite you to complete the personal statement below. This is your opportunity to help us get to know you in ways other than your courses, grades, and test scores. Please include any information you would like us to take into consideration when we review your application. Please attach your response to this application, or submit it online at www.wsu.edu/statement. Your personal statement should describe in detail (about 100 words per question) some special interest, significant experience, or achievement in each of the following areas:

1. Leadership/group contributions: Describe examples of your leadership experience and share how you have significantly influenced others, helped resolve disputes, or contributed to group efforts over time. Consider responsibilities you have taken for initiatives in or out of school.

2. Knowledge or creativity in a field: Describe any of your special interests and how you have developed knowledge in these areas. Give examples of your creativity: the ability to see alternatives; take diverse perspectives; come up with many, varied, or original ideas; or willingness to try new things.

3. Dealing with adversity: Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to address this challenge. Include whether you turned to anyone in facing that challenge, the role that person played, and what you learned about yourself.

4. Community service: Explain what you have done to make your community a better place to live. Give examples of specific projects in which you have been involved over time.

5. Handling systemic challenges: Describe your experiences facing or witnessing discrimination. Tell us how you responded and what you learned from those experiences and how they prepared you to contribute to the WSU community.

6. Goals/task commitment: Articulate the goals you have established for yourself and your efforts to accomplish them. Give at least one specific example that demonstrates your work ethic/diligence.

**Western Washington University**

We believe potential is measured by more than grades and test scores. Help us get to know you — what you're good at, what inspires you, what you stand for, and why Western is the right place for you to continue your education. Please note: the number of questions you respond to is up to you.

- What do you want to make sure the Admissions Committee knows about you? (Explanation of academic record, passions/interests, memorable experiences, defining moments, etc.)
- If you are interested in a particular academic area, tell us why. Do you have a dream job in mind? If so, we'd love to hear about it.
- Tell us how culture — either your own or your experience with others — has affected your outlook on the world. How have you contributed to a multicultural community and/or how will you promote multiculturalism at Western or in your career? (Required for applicants who wish to be considered for the Multicultural Achievement Program [MAP] Scholarship.)
Whitman College

Personal Essay

Please write an essay (250 words minimum) on a topic of your choice or on one of the options listed below. Please indicate your topic by checking the appropriate box. This personal essay helps us become acquainted with you as a person and student, apart from courses, grades, test scores, and other objective data. It will also demonstrate your ability to organize your thoughts and express yourself.

1) Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
2) Discuss some issue of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you.
3) Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.
4) Describe a character in fiction, a historical figure, or a creative work (as in art, music, science, etc.) that has had an influence on you, and explain that influence.
5) A range of academic interests, personal perspectives, and life experiences adds much to the educational mix. Given your personal background, describe an experience that illustrates what you would bring to the diversity in a college community, or an encounter that demonstrated the importance of diversity to you.
6) Topic of your choice.

Attach your essay to the last page on a separate sheet(s) (same size please). You must put your full name, date of birth, and name of secondary school on each sheet.

Required:

1. Please submit a copy of a graded, analytical paper from a junior or senior year English class or, for transfer students, a college course. Your essay should include teacher comments and the grade earned. If a graded paper is not available, submit a critical analysis of a book you’ve read in the last two years. 
   NOTE: Your essay should not exceed five double-spaced, typed pages.

2. Whitman College is committed to building and sustaining a diverse campus community. We believe a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives enriches our community and enhances intellectual and personal growth. What is your concept of diversity, and what experiences have you had that inform your thoughts?
   NOTE: Your response should not exceed 350 words.

Optional:


Whitworth University

These personal statements help us become acquainted with you in ways different from courses, grades, test scores, and other objective data. They also demonstrate your ability to organize your thoughts and express yourself. We are looking for essays that will help us know you better as a person and as a student. Please answer two of the following questions. Limit your response for each question to 500 words.

1. Whitworth’s mission is to provide “an education of the mind and heart.” What does this mean to you, and how will it apply to you personally when you are a Whitworth student?
2. Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
3. Describe the significance of Whitworth’s identity as a Christian liberal arts college in your decision to apply.
4. Describe the environment in which you grew up and how it shaped your personal goals.
5. Discuss an issue of national or international concern and its importance to you.
When Writing your Personal Statement...

taken from
Rock Hard Apps
Katherine Cohen, Ph.D.

Do’s and Don’ts of Writing Great Essays

Do:

- Make sure your essay reveals something about your character and personality.
- Answer the question.
- Show your character and personality through lively anecdotes that make you come alive as a person.
- Be honest. If there is something strange about your record, you should explain it in your essay or in a letter that functions as an additional essay.
- Let your own voice be heard!
- Write about something small in scale, a story only you can tell, in your own words, something an admissions reader wouldn’t otherwise know about you.
- Follow directions concerning the length and format of the essay as they appear on each individual application. However, if you have 537 words for a 500-word essay, don’t sweat it. Admissions officers don’t v the time to count up your words. If you send a three-page essay and the application asks for only one page, that is going overboard.

(Note: if you apply on line, the computer program counts the words of an essay, so you may not be able to get away with more words than the maximum requested.)

(DON’T ITEMS ARE ON THE NEXT PAGE)
Don’t:

- Write about global events that have had little impact on your private life.
- Use the same essay for every single application unless they ask the same open-ended question. Be sure to change the name of the college in each!
- Tell about your character and personality through a mere list of attributes.
- Make up a story—college admissions readers are seasoned veterans when it comes to “voice,” and they will be able to tell when you are being insincere.
- Be tempted to let another person offer too much editorial help.
- Use the thesaurus words that you think sound sophisticated: Colleges want to get to know you, not Roget!
- Write about your SAT scores or your grades. The essay is a chance for you to express yourself as a human being, not a mere statistic.
- Write a long list of activities—those belong in the Brag Sheet [Academic Resume].
- Write about a tragedy that happened to somebody else—colleges want you to be the star of your own story.
- Use gimmicks, like writing in a haiku style or entirely in Old English.
- Write about yourself in the third person—it sounds pretentious and arcane.
- Handwrite your essay—unless it’s for Brown University.
Best and Worst Essays

BEST:

- An essay from a science student who described his love of playing in a rock band in front of his hometown audience. The essay provided just the type of supplemental character insight that his application needed and enlightened us about his musical talents.
- A student who wrote about coming in last place. And essays about the “home” country from the foreign students.
- . . .What’s most important is that students write about something that is important to them—don’t try to guess what an admission officer wants to read.
- An essay about the first time a father and son went shopping together.
- A female applicant who wrote about taking architecture classes and talking to a drag queen one night in uptown Manhattan.
- An essay by a student from Israel who was selected to be in an international leadership conference and whose roommate and subsequent best friend there turned out to be a Palestinian. The essay talked about their similarities and differences and the writer’s emotional struggles when his Palestinian friend was tragically killed at a demonstration.
- Essays about family and family dynamics.
- Essays that best convey a sense of who the applicant is.

WORST:

- Death: It is a difficult topic, so universal that it’s tough to make personal and risks sounding disingenuous if you play on your reader’s pity.
- Attempts at humor that fall flat, or gimmicky essays that fall in their attempts at being witty.
- Summer camp essays—too generic, and usually quite trivial.
- [Sexual exploits, abortions, kleptomania, pyromania, etc]
- Bad grammar . . . admissions readers evaluate essays according to grammar and writing ability as much as topic and theme.
- Students underestimating themselves. If you are shy or reticent, that is a reflection on your personality.