

The College Essay

Tips for Writing Effective Essays

"The essay is a chance to make an impact. We want to see how students think through the essay - how they tackle the topics. It's not just content but also form - so be sure that it's well written. "

-A. Rodriguez, Pitzer College

Steps of the Writing Process

Start well in advance of the deadline and be patient as you work through the steps.

Think about the topic. What is the question really asking?

Brainstorm.

Write a draft.

Elicit comments and responses from other. What do you want to know more about? Does my essay sound genuine and honest? Does my essay address the question? Does it need to be more creative to stand apart from other essays? Read your essay aloud to yourself.

Wait.

Revise by asking yourself: What does this essay say about me?

Wait.

Revise by checking organization and clarity. Is my focus clear? Do anecdotes support what the essay says, and are the parts related to the main idea? Is it organized? How does it flow? Do I have a solid ending?

Edit to check spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

Make a copy and keep for other applicable application essays.

Relax.

Congratulate yourself; the hardest part is over.

The College Essay What can you write about?

((Writing the essay can be the most terrifying part of the application process. It requires a conscious act of presentation. It is the self-in-waiting on the blank page that terrifies, as even great writers will testify. " ~W Dix, Amherst College

- **How has a particular place influenced you?** Don't feel limited to places of grandeur such as foreign countries. A room full of people speaking a different language, a science lab, a photo darkroom, or a stage may say something about you.
- **Have you ever been in a tense, demanding, grueling, exhilarating, or frightening situation?** How did you handle it? What does this imply about you?
- **Has a relative, employer, friend, or neighbor influenced you?** How? How are you different as a result?
- **Do you have a dream?** Can anything stop you from achieving your dream?
- **Write about an ironic turn of events, which worked out in your favor.** For example, perhaps you learned a great lesson from someone you don't get along with or you discover your talents in writing while trying to take pictures for the school newspaper. How did this experience allow you to grow?
- **Think about a book, experience, quotation, or idea.** Show how it reflects or shapes your outlook and aspirations.
- **Tell us about yourself.** Describe your personality and a special accomplishment. Illustrate the unique aspects of who you are, what you do, and what you want out of life. Share an experience that made an impact on you. Write about a great learning experience.

The College Essay
Tips for Writing Effective Essays

"We look for students who rise to the challenge of a question by making it uniquely their own and who, through their writing, communicate their ideas, thoughts and feelings to others ... students should show us that they are willing to think ... "

~W Dix, Amherst College

Write in an informal, personal language. Excellent essays are certainly structured, but a sincere and personal one pervades. You are writing for a person, not a class.

The best essays are imaginative and descriptive. They highlight experience or facts that are otherwise unknown.

Example: *"Although the article said it was possible, I found it difficult to believe. So, I decided to test out this freak of nature. "*

The average writer writes correctly - but not effectively. Do not just casually mention special interests and values without any real explanation of why they are relevant to the topic. Example: *"I would value being a croissant, because of its renowned heritage - to begin with, its political reputation. "*

Too often applicants feel that they must write about a "big event," such as a trip to Europe or an academic experience, such as an AP class. An essay is not outstanding because of its subject, but because it goes beyond description to a discussion of what made that experience unique to you.

Example: *"I was going to make a pickle glow."*

Use I, me, we, and us.

If the essay asks for 300 words, don't submit 50 or 500 words. Likewise, if the essay specifies to use the space provided, do so.

Use contractions. They make your prose sound more natural.

Don't ramble. Say what you have to say and conclude. Don't exaggerate. Don't write to impress.

Does your first sentence hook the reader? Does it make you want to read on?

Examples: *"It was the middle of November, 1990. I got the idea in an Omni magazine. " "If I could be any roll in society, I would be a croissant. "*
"The Barnyard has taught me things that I couldn't have discovered through more traditional educational means. "

Your conclusion should add substance to your essay, not restate what has already been stated. Leave a strong final image.

Example: *"It was an evening that I will remember for the rest of my life, because of the closeness I felt with the people who helped me make a pickle glow. "*

The College Essay
Scoring Guide for College Application Essays

"We're not interested in the right answers, since we don't feel there are any. Instead, what we want the students to show is their willingness to delve into topics, demonstrating their intellectual curiosity and showing off their writing prowess. The capacity to confront challenging questions is an important part of academic life: the essay gives us a small sample of a student's ability to do so."

-W'Dix, Amherst College

19-81 The best essays reveal the writer's personality through carefully selected and evocative details. Original ideas or observations are thoroughly developed, and the question posed is responsibly addressed.

16-71 These essays also impart a sense of the writer's personality, but they are less vivid, less focused, and more general than the best essays. Although using a fresh approach, the essays perhaps do not tackle a unique subject or address the topic less thoroughly. These essays are well written in an appropriate style, but with less mastery than the top papers. Some lapses in diction or syntax may appear, but the writing demonstrates sufficient control over the elements of composition to present the writer's ideas correctly.

14-51 These essays contain predictable approaches to commonplace subjects with a standard organizational plan. Observations and conclusions are less detailed, more superficial. They are adequately written, but do not demonstrate control over a full range of elements of composition. Organization is evident, but may not be fully realized or particularly effective.

Q These essays are generally boring, unfocused, impersonal, and ill conceived. No organizational plan is evident; little attention to the question posed is obvious.

00 These essays are completely off the mark or seriously deficient in intelligible content.

They are so full of grammatical, punctuation, and spelling errors that the writer is obviously not bound for success in college.

The College Essay Sample Score "9" Essays

Essay Type: Personal Statement

#225 - SACAC - Des Moines, IA "What do

you see as an important event in your life and why do you see it as such?"

It was the middle of November, 1990. I got the idea in an *Omni* magazine. I was about to embark on one of the most important events in my life. I was going to make a pickle glow.

Although the article said it was possible, I found it difficult to believe. So, I decided to test out this freak of nature. I gathered my friends together on a slow Friday night, to begin our most exciting scientific expedition of the year. Such an even couldn't be held without documentation, or a pickle. Jeff and Scott were in charge of obtaining the means of documentation and the pickle. We also needed electrical equipment. John, Kit, and I were responsible for acquiring these items, including electrodes and a power source, or in layman's terms: nails connected to a cut off power cord of a lamp, (to be inserted into a wall socket.)

As the documentary team was filming their pickle buying procedure, we soldered the electronics together and debated the possibilities of what would happen. Kit was positive that we'd blow a fuse when we plugged in the pickle. I didn't care if the fuse blew. Instead I worried about the person who was going to insert the plug that was attached to a wet pickle into a 120 V power source. Although I thought that person was probably safe unless he was standing barefoot in a puddle of water, a little parent inside my head told me to stay away from the socket. I then remembered this was the same parent who had told me to stand back from the VCR the first time he set it up because, "It might blow up!"

The parent in my head left as Jeff and Scott ran through the front door yelling, "We have it! We have it!" The rest of us jumped to our feet and followed Jeff and Scott out the back door. We stabbed the pickle on each end with an electrode and prayed.

Everything was set; all we needed to do was plug it into the socket. The experiment was my idea and it was held in my backyard, so I was given the honors of either making my head explode or making the pickle glow. Scott started the tape. I struggled to find the outlet in the darkness of the night. After what seemed like forever, I found the power source and in one movement plugged the cord in and jumped away. Nothing happened. As we stood there in silence, a breeze chilled our bones. We waited. As we waited, we were trying to find a new approach to our experiment. Kit told me to unplug the pickle, but we waited just a little bit longer when, "snap." A spark flew through the pickle. Our ears perked up. We could now hear the insect-like buzz of the high voltage. "Snap." It happened again, one end of the pickle glowed yellow for an instant. The snaps became more frequent and transformed into a crackle. We could almost read by the pickle light. Cheers could now be heard over the electric crackles. Kit was yelling obscenities in his exhilaration while John, Jeff, and Scott were rejoicing cheers of "Yes!" and "Whoo!" I just stood with my hands in my pockets smiling from ear to ear in pride and amazement.

Afterwards, we tried to electrocute different food items, but none of them worked. We decided to plug the pickle back in and play with putting electrodes in different places. When the pickle lost its conductivity, we watched the video and called it a night.

Some people wonder why I see this experiment as a major event in my life. I remember this scientific adventure as important, because it had almost everything that I lived for in one night. It had creativity, ingenuity, spontaneity, excitement, success, and best of all, friends. It was an evening that I will remember for the rest of my life, because of the closeness I felt with the people who helped me make a pickle glow.