

Five Steps to Start Writing Your College Admissions Essay

The college application process can be grueling. By the time you reach the essay portion of the application, you have probably been sitting at your computer or at the kitchen table for hours, filling out the same information about yourself and your grades over and over again. Although it can feel intimidating to try to write the “perfect” essay, this is actually an opportunity to let your creativity shine and have some fun. Here are some tips for getting started on writing a strong admissions essay.

Pick the Right Topic

Choosing a topic can be tough. Fortunately, you typically don’t have to choose a topic out of thin air. You’ll be given a few prompts to choose from on the application. Don’t immediately choose what you think will be easiest. Instead, get out some scratch paper and start brainstorming. Under each prompt, start webbing some ideas for what you might write. This is the time to test out any and all ideas -- don’t be afraid to think outside the box! If you’re struggling to come up with ideas for one prompt, try the next one. Admissions counselors want to see your authentic self represented in your essay -- if you feel like you can’t truly represent yourself through a certain prompt, try working with another that fits you better.

Make It Personal (and Interesting)

Just like admissions counselors want to see your authentic self in your essay, they want to know that you see your authentic self as well. Self-reflection is one of the staple elements of a college admissions essay. Don’t give cookie-cutter answers to questions about who you are -- really reflect. What are your values, interests, strengths, and weaknesses? How can you reflect on those in a personal way in response to the given essay prompt? Using personal anecdotes to demonstrate things about yourself is a good way to make a strong point.

Remember that admissions counselors will be reading a large number of essays. What can you do to make your essay stand out? What sets you apart from other applicants? Being homeschooled is a unique factor -- how has that influenced your education, interests, and personality? Are your study interests or extracurriculars unique? Often one of the best ways to stand out in a crowd of essays is to have a compelling opening. Spend time brainstorming opening lines and hooks separately from your essay since it is such an important part of the whole.

Be Specific

If you’re applying to several different schools, you might be tempted to reuse the same essay in all of your applications; however, you’re far better off crafting each essay to each individual school. Instead of writing a generalized essay to try to fit several different prompts, take the time to write each specific essay. When you cite personal examples, be specific and clear. This will

result in a far better essay than a generalized one. Just like when you're writing an essay for a class, the assessor will want to see that you can make a clear point using specific examples and reasoning.

Do Sweat the Details

While the "big picture" of your essay is important, so are the little things. This means you should be thorough in spell checking, proofing, and editing your essay. If possible, have a parent or friend read your work. They can help point out errors and inconsistencies. They are also a great tool for telling you whether the essay works as a *whole* -- does the flow of your piece work for a reader? Did they find any parts confusing? Is there anything they would add, change, or remove for clarity?

Run the Final Checklist

- **Did I answer the essay prompt?** If the answer isn't a resounding yes, head back to the drawing board and rework your essay so that it's 100% clear that you've understood and responded to the prompt.
- **Do I meet all length and formatting requirements?** Double check the standards laid out in the application to make sure your paper is perfectly formatted. Check your spacing, margins, font style, font size, and sources, if applicable.
- **Have I reread my work?** In addition to having a parent or another trusted source critique your essay, make sure you take time to revise on your own too. Experts recommend reading your own essay aloud. This will slow you down so you can catch any room for improvement.
- **Am I happy with the final outcome?** Your college admissions essay should be reflective of some of your best work -- it is the beginning of the next steps in your academic career. If you're not happy with the quality of the work or the content of the essay, take a step back and breathe. Then try to figure out why you're not happy with your work, and try again.

Other Resources:

- 35+ Best College Essay Tips from Application Experts:
<https://www.collegeessayguy.com/blog/college-essay-tips>
- Popular College Application Topics (and How to Answer Them):
<https://www.princetonreview.com/college-advice/application-essay-topics>
- 9 Essay Writing Tips to 'Wow' College Admissions Officers:
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/college/2014/10/23/9-essay-writing-tips-to-wow-college-admissions-officers/37397979/>
- How to Write a College Essay:
<https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/how-to-write-a-college-essay>