

Where can I find additional information?

Try these books:

The Admissions Essay: Clear and Effective Guidelines on How to Write the Most Important College Entrance Essay

(Main stacks LB 2351.52 U6 P69 1998)

College Applications and Essays

(Main stacks LB 2351.52 U6 V37 1992)

Essays That Will Get You Into College

(Main stacks LB 2351.52 U6 B87 1998)

On Writing the College Application Essay

(Main stacks LB 2351.5 B38 1987)

Rock hard Apps: How to Write a Killer College Application

(Main stacks LB2351.52 U6 C64 2003)

Writing a Successful College Application Essay: the Key to College Admission

(Main stacks LB 2351.5 E37 1993)

Writing Your College Application Essay

(Main stacks LB 2351.52 U6 M34 1991)

The following websites will also provide helpful information:

College Essays

(<http://teenink.com/College/Essays.html>)

Tips for Writing Your College Application Essay

(<http://www.acm.edu/admiss/essay.pdf>)

Writing the Essay

(<http://www.bates.edu/essay.xml>)

Writing Your Essay: Personal Statement for College

(<http://www-med.stanford.edu/school/smosp/nojava/prepare/writing.html>)

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WRITING THE COLLEGE ADMISSION ESSAY

Writing an essay for a college application is becoming increasingly important as a way to select students for admission into colleges and universities. This guide will provide some essay writing tips as well as list other resources and websites.

What is the purpose of the college application essay?

The college application includes a lot of information about applicants—grades, test scores, lists of extracurricular activities, etc.—but not much personal information. The essay allows the college or university staff an opportunity to find out something about you and whether you will succeed in an academic setting. The essay demonstrates your writing ability, a key component to success in college. Colleges are looking for a mastery of the basic mechanics of writing (grammar, spelling, syntax, and organization). The essay also reflects the maturity of your thinking and writing and your overall readiness for college.

Who is the audience for the college essay?

Your essay will be read by a college admission officer who reads hundreds or thousands of application essays each year. Admission officers generally spend just one to two minutes reading an essay. To capture their interest and distinguish you from other students, it is critical that your essay capture their attention. It is also important that your essay provide an accurate picture of who you are and why you would be a good candidate for college while demonstrating your writing ability.

What types of topics are required for the application essays?

There are generally three types of application topics:

General Topics – “Tell us about yourself” questions

Specific Questions – about a favorite book, a beloved teacher, a life goal, or a significant experience

Creative questions – questions that require you to reveal your thoughts or opinions on a topic, such as: Why have you chosen this career or profession? Choose an issue of personal, local, or international concern and discuss its importance to you.

Some typical college application questions:

What work of art, music, science, mathematics, or literature has surprised or unsettled or challenged you, and in what way?

What is your favorite word and why?

Reflecting on your family’s experiences and personal circumstances, what would you tell us that is not already revealed or explained sufficiently in your application?

Explain your long-range goals for school, employment, and life. In your essay, describe what specific skills, personal values, and cultural values you want to foster in yourself to achieve these ends.

Tell us about a conversation you had that changed your perspective or has otherwise been meaningful to you.

What should I write about?

If the application asks you to choose a topic to write about and you can’t think of one, here are some suggestions for essays:

- Write about an event (local, national, international) that has touched you in a personal way.
- Write about a social issue (e.g., gun control, whale protection) that is near and dear to you.
- Write about an out-of-classroom interest or hobby not covered to your fullest advantage elsewhere in your application.
- Write about an academic subject (e.g., music, literature) that engages you. There may be essay material on courses you have taken.
- Write about a person (e.g., parent, grandparent) that has greatly affected your life.

Remember to write about what you know!

What is the best way to handle a topic?

There are some key points to remember when approaching the topic:

- Be sure to **answer the essay** question and to follow **all** directions
- Stick to the recommended or required length for the essay
- Use correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling
- Use a writing style you find comfortable and that is appropriate for the subject matter
- Select a topic that interests you and that you know something about
- Start off with a strong opening paragraph that captures the reader’s interest
- Check all of your facts. If you mention a date, place, or event in your essay, make sure it is correct
- Make a point and stick with it; develop your argument or narrative
- Start early and allow yourself time to rewrite and revise
- Write a draft and let it sit for a week, then edit the essay critically
- Have at least two other people read and edit your essay for misspellings and grammatical errors
- Presentation matters so make sure your essay is neat and word processed; sloppy mistakes makes it look like you don’t take the essay (or your application) seriously
- Photocopy your essay and get a receipt from the post office before you mail it

How can I make my essay stand out?

Try some of the following techniques to enhance your essay:

- If you are writing about an event or social issue, find some statistics to support your point of view
- Be honest; do not brag or inflate your accomplishments; avoid writing about how wonderful you are
- Be vivid. Use descriptions and adjectives to spark up your sentences
- Avoid gimmicks, such as writing a poem or making a videotape; stick to the essay format and be succinct
- Humor can be risky, so be careful how you use it, but it can perk up your essay if done well
- Personalize your essay by providing insight into your interests and character; express your beliefs
- Stand out from the crowd by exploring a new angle or investigating an unusual or unpopular opinion
- Be specific; don’t use vague generalities (e.g., England is a big country)