

# **A FIVE STEP GUIDE TO WRITING THE ALL IMPORTANT COLLEGE ESSAY**

**Purpose of College Essays:** to make admissions officers want to admit you.

## **1. BRAINSTORM TOPICS - THIS STEP TAKES TIME.**

Do both: Think of interesting topics regardless of the specific essay questions AND read essay questions first and think of topics which would address them. Read all essays questions a few times to really understand them. Then write down all possible experiences, aspects of your life, and themes that you could write about. Don't limit yourself- write everything down that pops into your head.

MAKE A LIST OF: a. favorite hobbies or talents, b. influential people in your life, c. what you've done in the past four years including summers, d. best/worst/funniest day/experience, e. how have you changed in the past four years, f. most memorable experience with sister/brother, mom, dad, best friend, teacher, coach, etc., g. an accomplishment that sticks out, h. what makes you special, i. your strongest quality, j. a strong belief/philosophy that you hold, k. the most challenging thing you've done, l. how you've shown leadership in your life, etc.....let your mind wander.....come back and add to this list so that you can choose a topic that you will love to write about.

## **2. NARROW DOWN LIST OF TOPICS**

Cross out those topics which are boring or commonplace. YOUR GOAL IS ORIGINALITY! 90% of students write about the same, predictable essays. Don't be one of them.

Tips for narrowing down:

a. Take a unique approach if talking about your dad, friend, a sport, etc.. An ordinary topic is fine, but talk about it in an uncommon way.

b. Does the topic have a story or supporting examples with concrete details to elaborate on your topic? Does the topic allow you to analyze an issue? Eg. you want to write about the fact that you hate hugging people- talk about why?- DIG BELOW THE SURFACE OF A TOPIC. GOOD ESSAYS CONTAIN DETAILED REFLECTION ABOUT THE TOPIC. , c.

Can your idea be fully expressed in 500 words or less? Admissions officers like creative and interesting essays that are no more than 3 pages. , d. Is your idea interesting and creative? Ask others you trust and be honest with yourself. Will any person who reads your essay be able to connect with or understand the topic or idea? Don't write about something that people will not relate to., e. Will the topic show the real you? Is it meaningful to you? Does it give the reader a window into what makes you you?, f. Can you reuse this topic for another essay question for another school?

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YOUR FINAL TOPIC SHOULD BE ONE THAT IS PASSIONATE AND NATURAL FOR YOU TO WRITE ABOUT.

## **3. WRITE THE ESSAY- ANSWER IT IN A UNIQUE WAY**

Writing the essay is the only way to see if your idea sounds just as good on paper as it did in your head. Once on paper, it may seem silly, too difficult to write about, or boring. If so, try another.

**A few tips** while writing: a. **Be yourself**- show the reader the real you by choosing a meaningful topic. Admissions officers quickly spot "fake" essays. b. **speak in your own**

**voice-** use simple, and concise wording and be truthful (but not too truthful that the school wouldn't want you) , c. An **effective introduction** is creative and captivating, making the reader wanting to read on. It is also fairly descriptive and detailed. But **be brief** and don't get carried away. Move on with your essay. , d. **The focus** of the essay should always be on **YOU-** your goals, thoughts, attitudes- not on another person. , e. Make the essay **memorable-** get the reader to relate to your essay through the **feelings** you evoke in it, NOT the actual events, f. ask yourself if the reader would be **interested** in hearing the learning about the dilemma you faced in your essay or the outcome of your story. Put yourself in their shoes., g. Use **original language-** play with your language, Vary the length of sentences and present questions. Use ordinary language and Don't use clichés, h. Use appropriate **humor**, but don't be intentional about it and use it ONLY IF YOU CAN. Make the reader laugh and they'll remember you., i. Show them how you've **matured** and grown through your essay., j. **DRAW** the reader **Into** you essay. Make them feel like part of the action by using rich description. K. A Powerful Conclusion-**BANG!** – something thought provoking or a memorable line that will make the reader remember you.

4. **WRITE, EDIT, REWRITE, EDIT .....Have A FEW (at least 2 or more) Good Editors.** (parents, teachers, hint hint.....)

Use **their** suggestions on how to improve your essay. Don't take their criticisms personally- LISTEN TO THEM. Their goal is to help you create the best possible essay you can.

5. **MAKE YOUR ESSAY SPARKLE**

**Tips: PLEASE!!!! perfect your spelling and grammar. Do it yourself and don't just use spellcheck on your computer. (tip: read your essay backwards when spellchecking.) Have MANY readers help you check it. COUNT YOUR WORDS- stay within the guidelines of the essay, eg. 500 words.**

**TOPICS TO AVOID: THESE TOPICS ARE OFF LIMITS!**

School violations, illegal acts, explanation of bad grades (do this somewhere else), why University/College X is perfect, personal insecurities or emotional problems, your plan to make the world happy and peaceful or any other unrealistic dream, the "big" game/match.

**FINAL TIP: THERE IS NO EASY SHORT CUT TO WRITING A GOOD ESSAY. IT TAKES TIME AND HARD WORK. START EARLY AND GIVE YOURSELF TIME TO REVISE IT AND MAYBE YOUR STELLAR ESSAY WILL GET YOU INTO ONE OF YOUR "REACH" COLLEGES.**