

10 COLLEGE ESSAY TIPS | To Help You Wow Admissions

1. Address the Prompt

If there's one completely preventable mistake that students make, it's failing to address the prompt provided by the school.

Here's an example: A University's essay prompt is "Tell Us About (Mascot)." This is an awesome essay opportunity! It's a creative writer's dream, a chance to explore any number of avenues – fiction, poetry, an exploration of history or science. The possibilities are endless but remember – there is a prompt. In the end, your essay must answer a question.

This isn't an opportunity to meander off into philosophical ramblings, or to summarize your academic accomplishments. No matter the route you take, you should address the topic of the essay. In doing so, you'll show the admissions team that you understand one of the traits they're combing through students to find – the ability to follow directions!

2. Brainstorm as Much as You Write

Don't pick up a pen (or computer, more likely!) until you have really thought about what you want to tell the college about yourself. Having trouble coming up with something? Talk to people about your essay topic like trusted school advisors, close friends, and your family, and ask them what they think is your greatest personality trait.

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3. Keep It Personal

Most students talk about themselves in their college essays. That isn't necessarily the wrong tactic – depending on the prompt, of course. But there's more to keeping it personal than just telling the reader about you.

- This essay should sound like you. Your voice, your language. Be consistent.
- Be as specific and detailed as possible. Paint a picture. Help the reader to experience your essay with you (while keeping it concise – more on that later).
- Read your essay aloud to yourself, over and over. Read it once in the morning, and once at night. Read it aloud to somebody else. Have someone else read it to you to figure out where they stumble. As you make edits, your work will begin to sound more and more natural, and your voice and personality will emerge.

4. Choose a Theme

Don't try to cover everything about yourself in your college essay. Think about your best personal trait, your interests, values, and goals. Focus on one of these qualities and make it the theme of your essay.

Maintaining your focus will help you to avoid the clichés and sweeping generalizations that can make college essays common place. Admissions officers aren't engaged by grand statements about life or the world, but applicants are all too happy to provide those observations as evidence of maturity. This is a big pitfall, and here's the ugly truth – if you write too philosophically, you're likely to put your admissions rep to sleep.

Remember, you're addressing a reader who reads many, potentially too many, of these essays every year, for a living. This isn't a person who is likely to be impressed by theories on education or observational generalizations. The theme of your essay should be you.

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5. Use Imagery and Examples

Not everyone is a professional quality writer but adding examples and imagery to your story will help put the reader in your shoes. Instead of saying, "it was a great day," describe what about it was a great - "the day was filled with energy, cheer and crisp fall leaves." Be vivid.

6. Let it Flow

Disregard grammar, vocabulary, and structure when writing your first draft (but only your first draft!). Instead, let your ideas flow naturally. Jot down everything you can think of that helps demonstrate your point. Later, you can go back and edit to make sure your essay is clearly communicated, properly punctuated, and filled with flowing prose.

7. Edit and Proofread

Once you have your ideas and thoughts on paper, now is the time to edit, proofread, edit, proofread, edit, and proofread. Get the point? Read your essay more times than you think you need to. Think about the structure of every sentence. Could it be phrased in a better way? Run spell check, grammar check, and have others read it looking for errors.

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8. Be Clear, Concise, and Direct

Stick within the limits outlined on your college application. If there is no specific limit, keep your essay around 500 words. Make sure every word counts, get to your point right away, and leave out information that isn't relevant. This can be tricky, especially when you are trying to be specific and detailed so that your reader can experience your personality, but it is essential. Remember, admissions officers must read stacks of these, and you don't want to frustrate them by submitting longer than necessary essay.

9. Accentuate the Positive

Students often choose to write about painful experiences. That's okay but remember to accentuate what you gained from that experience.

10. Get Feedback

Have others read your essay. Ask them what they learned about you from the essay. Did you get your point across? If not, rethink your examples and make some

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