

Tips for Writing Application Essays

If you're free to write your application essay on any topic under the sun, you'll need to pinpoint a topic that's just right for you. To narrow your options, consider the following:

Use the essay to reveal yourself.

Talk about what that winning basket meant to you last year, or how proud you were when you received a complimentary letter from someone who read your editorial in the school paper. This will help admissions counselors know the real you, not just the numbers on your transcript or college admissions test.

Use the essay to show you are a hard worker.

If you've dealt with something difficult in your life, use it to show how you worked hard and overcame it. If there is particular hardship (like a family illness, a disability or a death) that affected your high school performance, you should provide admissions counselors with a separate written record of this.

Use the essay as an explanation for grades.

If a teacher gave you low marks, show how you persisted and how your grades improved. Only do this if the outcome is positive. If you just couldn't get along with a teacher, it will reflect poorly on you.

Use the essay to show what you can do with opportunity.

Write about your first job. Write about how you have sought mentors in your life. Write about how you are excited to start your chosen career field because it's always been your dream, and attending college will make it a reality.

Use the essay to show your writing skills.

The essay will show admissions counselors your writing, organizational, analytical and language skills. Writing is often a big part of college, and admissions counselors will use your essay as a measure of how well you write. If you use humor, have a teacher or counselor review your essay to make sure the humor is appropriate.

If you're still having trouble choosing a topic or simply getting started, don't be afraid to ask for help. Most students do! A parent, teacher, guidance counselor or other trusted adult can be a valuable resource and may offer you insights about yourself.

Have a high school teacher look at your essay for spelling, grammar and punctuation mistakes. Make revisions to the essay until you are satisfied it's the best you can do.

Things to Avoid in Your Essay

- Don't write what you think the admissions office wants to hear.
- Don't write about information that you supplied elsewhere in your application.
- Don't be too wordy. Be specific but eliminate unnecessary words.
- Don't simply list your experiences or accomplishments. Describe how they're relevant.