



# Essay Writing Tips

## What's Important in My College Application?

Your transcript is the most important factor, but your essay is also significant, especially when an admissions counselor or director is undecided about your application. The quality of your essay can make or break acceptance to a school.

### What your writing says about you:

- Depth of character
- Sense of personality
- Communication skills
- Independent and critical thinking
- You are a problem solver
- How have you grown? Do you understand your growth?
- Maturity – you are ready to take on the rigors of a liberal arts education.
- You have done your research about your prospective school's academics.
- Most importantly, that you are ready for a transformative experience. Are you looking for this type of experience?

### The most successful essays:

- Take the reader into your world.
- Are about an experience that is meaningful to you.
- Write about who you are, not who you think a college wants you to be.
- Critical thinking is essential in this process.
- Are honest and demonstrate vulnerability.
- Exhibit a marriage between content and form of writing. Read authors/people you find intriguing, styles of writing you appreciate, these voices will come through in your own style.
- It is okay to be creative as long as you are conveying concrete details about yourself and your growth. Be careful not to let your creativity or writing style get in the way of the content. Creativity in an essay should never be a gimmick.
- The best essays are so far into the revision process that they can feel creative.
- Use an active voice which conveys confidence.
- Synthesize research about the potential school (their values, philosophies and courses of study) with your own thoughts.

### Additional Writing Tips

- If you are feeling stuck, try free writing, writing in the third person, or write a bio about yourself and see if anything sparks an idea.

- Polished writing is not only important in your personal essay, but also in your short answers. Admissions committees pay attention to short answers, so make sure you put the same amount of care and attention into this part of the application.
- When you send an e-mail to an admissions officer, take the time to make sure it is also a polished piece of writing. Do not treat it as a casual message or text.
- Two of the most important questions you will be asked are “Why X school?”, and “Is there any other additional information you’d like us to know about you?” Treat these answers with great care.

### **How to Polish Your Work:**

- Do not rush, take your time, and allow time for many revisions.
- Review your writing carefully for typos, incorrect spelling, grammatical errors, etc. Solicit feedback from trusted 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> readers who can help with content and editing.
- Vary your sentence length and how you begin sentences.
- Pay attention to the rhythm of your writing. Read it out loud.

### **Writing Exercises to Guide your Essay Writing:**

Exercise #1: Think about your strengths. Write a biography of yourself in the third person. Imagine you are at an awards ceremony (Grammy’s, ESPY’s, etc.): what would your introduction be?

Reference the following:

- Your favorite academic subject
- Something about the world that fascinates you
- An influential person
- Something you have learned in high school
- Something you plan to do
- Extracurricular activities/volunteering
- Leadership
- A shameless compliment
- What you do in your spare time

Exercise #2: Take one of the points you referenced in the previous exercise and hone in on this one bullet. No need to write in third person anymore. Ask yourself:

- What is the history of this?
- Why is this true for me?
- How does this connect to my values?

Exercise #3: Create a dream bio/Forecast your future.

*A Bridges Project for Education Infosheet Adapted from a Workshop Presented by Diana Alvarez, Assistant Director of Admission, Mount Holyoke College, October 2011*