

Ten Tips for Writing the College Essay



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READY FREDDY?

Sure you know why your kid is special. Unfortunately, you can't sit down with college admissions people to tell them why your child would make a terrific addition to their school. The college essay is the opportunity for your child to make a statement before the admissions committee. Think of the essay as a stage where your child's personality gets to shine.

Share these tips on writing college application essays with your teen:

- **START EARLY** Starting early buys you the luxury of revising and rewriting the essay. You can write it, put it away for a few days, then take a fresh look at it later. Walking away and then coming back brings a fresh perspective to the work -- without the pressure and stress that comes with a time crunch.

- **CHOOSE A SPECIFIC TOPIC**

Many colleges ask applicants to describe a special interest, an experience that changed their life, or a person who influenced them. An essay on why you participated in the extra-curricular activities you chose in school, as well as what you learned from those choices, can be an excellent topic.

List a bunch of essay topics and then add some key points for each one. Decide which topic has the most potential; it should be something that you feel strongly about so that it really comes alive when you write about it.

- **OUTLINE WHAT YOU WANT TO COVER**

Use the brainstorming process. Make a list of all the ideas you want to include--don't rule anything out. List everything you can think of. Then go back over the list and check off or circle the major points you want to cover.

- **WORK ON THE OPENING PARAGRAPH**

Think of lots of different ways to begin. There are many approaches that can be used. Warm up by using a meaningful quote or definition. Starting off with a rhetorical question that fits your situation is also a good way to get started. You might open your essay with a detailed description of the setting of an important experience you've had so that readers feel they were really there.

Pick the opener that best draws the reader in with an unusual, entertaining, or thoughtful hook in beginning.

- **COMPOSE A ROUGH DRAFT**

Use the outline you created to address each of your key points--as if you were having a conversation with someone. Try to be personal and, if it comes naturally, add humor.

Concentrate on content, use descriptive language, and give clear examples. Imagine that you're talking to a close friend when writing your essay. This technique should help the real you shine through. Remember, a rough draft doesn't have to be perfect. It just has to be a start.

- **REVIEW WHAT YOU'VE WRITTEN**

This time use a more critical eye. Is the essay interesting and well organized? Does it give a good picture of who you are? If it isn't as interesting as you'd like, add more examples and details.

Read your essay out loud to see if the essay flows. Make sure you're writing about yourself--not the person you imagine the admissions counselor will find interesting.

- **REWRITE YOUR ESSAY**

Writing the essay the first time is hard enough, but taking time to write another draft is well worth the effort. Show your essay to the school counselor, a high school English teacher, outside professional, or anyone who can give you an honest critique of it. Read your essay to your parents. Other people can often tell if there isn't enough being revealed, whether the essay rambles, or if the humor is falling flat.

- **EDIT YOUR FINAL DRAFT**

While we covered a lot about content, this time really look at the mechanics of the essay. Grammar, spelling, sentence structure, style, and tone all count. Double check everything so that nothing detracts from the finished product.

- **PROOFREAD! PROOFREAD! PROOFREAD!**

When it comes to proofreading, don't do it alone. Ask someone else to read your essay. Spell check programs on computers can only go so far in ensuring that everything is correct.

- **TAKE A LAST LOOK FOR DETAILS**

Is the essay clean? Is the typing, printing, and handwriting clear? Make sure your name and social security number are on the essay so that if it's separated from the application, it can quickly be matched up again. Pretend that you are reading the essay for the first time. Does it make the impression you want it to?