The College Essay: Tips from the Princeton Review

Telling Your Story to Colleges

So what sets you apart?

You have a unique background, interests and personality. This is your chance to tell your story (or at least part of it). The best way to tell your story is to write a personal, thoughtful essay about something that has meaning for you. Be honest and genuine, and your unique qualities will shine through.

Admissions officers have to read an unbelievable number of college essays, most of which are forgettable. Many students try to sound smart rather than sounding like themselves. Others write about a subject that they don't care about, but that they think will impress admissions officers.

## You don't need to have started your own business or have spent the summer hiking the Appalachian Trail. Colleges are simply looking for thoughtful, motivated students who will add something to the first-year class.

## Tips for a Stellar College Application Essay

1. Write about something that's important to you.

It could be an experience, a person, a book—anything that has had an impact on your life.

2. Don't just recount—reflect!

Anyone can write about how they won the big game or the summer they spent in Rome. When recalling these events, you need to give more than the play-by-play or itinerary. Describe what you learned from the experience and how it changed you.

3. Being funny is tough.

A student who can make an admissions officer laugh never gets lost in the shuffle. But beware. What you think is funny and what an adult working in a college thinks is funny are probably different. We caution against one-liners, limericks and anything off–color.

4. Start early and write several drafts.

Set it aside for a few days and read it again. Put yourself in the shoes of an admissions officer: Is the essay interesting? Do the ideas flow logically? Does it reveal something about the applicant? Is it written in the applicant’s own voice?

5. No repeats.

What you write in your application essay or personal statement should not contradict any other part of your application–nor should it repeat it. This isn't the place to list your awards or discuss your grades or test scores.

6. Answer the question being asked.

Don't reuse an answer to a similar question from another application.

7. Have at least one other person edit your essay.

A teacher or college counselor is your best resource. And before you send it off, check, check again, and then triple check to make sure your essay is free of spelling or grammar errors.

Your Assignment:

The college essay should be about YOU: your mission, purpose, or passion. You will write about yourself and your story. Reflect upon who YOU are. Some topics to generate ideas:

What are your short-term goals?

What are your long-term goals?

What is your plan to achieve your goals?

How have your dreams and aspirations been influenced by your family? community? school? other?

What are your personal talents or accomplishments?

What is an important contribution or experience of which you are proud?

How has your favorite book, movie, or work of art influenced you?

What was the most difficult time in your life and how did you change as a result of it?

Have you ever failed and learned? Have you succeeded and learned?

Have you ever had an epiphany?

Once you have decided on a topic, you are to write a 500-1000 word essay. It should be divided into paragraphs, use vivid imagery, and be clear in meaning.

Your essay should have a strong introduction. Do not summarize or even give away your topic immediately—make the reader want to continue and find out more. Certainly it should be unique but NOT silly.

Have strong transitions between paragraphs.

The essay should also have a **memorable** conclusion. Again, avoid summary and cliché phrases. Perhaps refer back to the introduction or explain its widespread appeal.

Remember all the formal rules of writing: no dead words, no contractions, no abbreviations, use active voice, use varied sentence structure, do not end sentences in prepositions, etc. Absolutely no errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation.

Refer to the rubric for additional details on the writing and grading process.

The essay will be uploaded to Turnitin. The similarity must be under 30%. This will be a first draft, but excellent writing should be demonstrated. This essay will be used for applying for colleges and scholarships in the future. It will be due by the first week of school.