

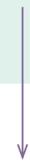


**Tell Your Story:
Crafting Great College
Admissions Essays**

Guidance/Actions

Guidance

The essay portion of your college application(s) is absolutely your moment to shine. Think of it as an opportunity to speak directly to the admissions committee. An impactful essay captures your authentic voice and opens up a window into your life experience, while showcasing your potential for success as a college student and beyond.



Actions

Relax about finding a unique essay topic.

Common subjects, such as sports, family relationships or hobbies are absolutely legitimate areas for you to explore as an introductory narrative. The admissions committee cares much more about your level of self-awareness and insight from an experience than they do about how unusual the experience was. Tell your readers something special that they can't see elsewhere in your application.

Except for the most selective colleges in the country, the content of your personal story is more important than sophisticated writing style. Solid writing skills are important, but you should allow your true voice to come

through. Resist the urge to find inspiration online by reading other people's essays.

Take a deep breath. Writing a college essay may seem like a daunting task, but it doesn't have to be. Remember, you aren't writing a complete autobiography. Instead, you are giving the admissions committee a thoughtful glimpse into one experience that inspires you and brings meaning to your life.

Virtually every application this year will give you the opportunity to submit a short statement about the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact it has had on you. This optional element of your college application is an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which the

pandemic has altered your junior spring and senior fall. Along with the other writing samples you submit, it will take on even greater importance as many of the data-based metrics that admissions officers typically consider may not be available to them (like second-semester Junior year grades or standardized test scores).

Guidance

Just about every college application includes an essay. You will likely submit a personal statement and sometimes additional writing samples in the form of supplement essays. While it might feel daunting at first, it is doable! Here are tips for finding a topic, getting organized, and soliciting feedback.



Actions

Before you start typing, allow yourself some time to reflect on your personal experiences, values, and life goals. This is time well spent! It will help you find your authentic voice. The admissions committee wants to know what makes you, *you*.

Get organized by gathering a list of questions required by your target schools and application deadlines. Think about which essays you want to tackle first. There is no right or wrong answer, so do what works for you.

Start writing. Don't worry about perfection, just get something down on paper. Remember, there is a reason a first draft is known as a "rough" draft. Once you've got words on the page you can think more concretely about structure and clarity. It's normal for your essay to go through multiple drafts before it's finished.

As you refine your essay, remember the importance of effective structure—it's easier than you think. The opening of your essay invites the reader's curiosity. The conclusion is where you'll be making a lasting impression, so focus on what you learned and how the experience has changed you, or what you hope to accomplish in the future. Be sure to share specific examples and vivid anecdotes throughout.

Solicit feedback from a parent, counselor, or mentor. Ask your critics what they learned about you. If they were adding a headline, what would it be? (Is that the headline you'd want?) Be open to comments. Even best-selling authors have readers review their work before they get published. It's all part of the process.

Our goal is to empower you with the right resources at the right time. College Guidance Network has carefully curated this list for you:

UPCOMING COLLEGE GUIDANCE NETWORK PROGRAMS:

“Crafting Great College Essays”
Sunday,
Dec. 6, 7:30-8:30 PM

“Ask Us Anything:
Admissions Experts Open Up”
Wednesday,
Dec. 16, 7-8 PM

Prompt

Provides coaching and individualized feedback on your college essay(s)

Listen to “Episode 7” of *The Search*, an admissions podcast sponsored by Dartmouth College and hosted by Dean Lee Coffin. The focus of the episode is how two members of the Class Of 2024 crafted unforgettable, highly effective essays.

Trusted Articles:

[“This is How You Write a College Essay”](#)

[“College Admissions in a Covid Year: SATs Are Out, Personal Stories Are In”](#)

[“College Applicants Will Make the Pandemic a Focus of Their Admissions Essays. Should They?”](#)

[“Georgia Tech Admissions Blog: “To Answer or Not To Answer the Covid-19 Question”](#)

[Johns Hopkins University Undergraduate Admissions: “Essays that Worked”](#)



To be a successful college applicant, it helps to know the lingo.

Clarity:

the quality of being clear. In the context of your college essay, it refers to keeping your message on point. Don't bury it beneath flowery language complex sentences. Write authentically and concisely to more effectively convey your message.

Coalition Application:

a college application platform accepted by over one hundred and thirty schools. You can select from five essay prompts. An application fee is required for each school to which you will apply, but fee waivers are available. Founded in 2015, the Coalition aims to improve the application process, particularly for those students from historically under-represented groups. Common Application: a college application platform accepted by over eight hundred schools. You can select from seven essay prompts. An application fee is required for each school to which you apply, but fee waivers are available.

Common Application:

a college application platform accepted by over eight hundred schools. You can select from seven essay prompts. An application fee is required for each school to which you apply, but fee waivers are available.

Contribution:

In the context of your college essay, your contribution is how your presence at an event or activity impacted not only yourself, but others who were involved, as well. How was your own life impacted by your presence, and how would the experience have been different for other people, had you not been there?

Holistic review:

An approach taken by college admissions departments when evaluating applicants. It is an application review process that takes each applicant into consideration as a whole person. As an admissions principle, an application is the sum of many parts and each part is one factor among many.

Personal Statement:

Your personal statement is your primary college essay--it is your introductory story to each of the colleges on your list. This autobiographical essay is how you'll convey to the admissions officer who you are.

Supplemental Essay:

Many schools, especially highly selective ones, will request additional writing samples to complement your personal statement. While the personal statement on the Common Application can be used for multiple application submissions, supplemental essays need to be different each time.

Questbridge:

College recruitment and free application platform, connecting the nation's most exceptional students from low-income backgrounds with leading institutions of higher education. QuestBridge finalists generally come from households earning less than \$65,000 a year for a family of four. Through the "National College Match" on Questbridge, students can apply to and be selected for admission to partner colleges with full, four-year scholarships.



For many families, conversations about how things are going with college applications can be challenging. **So, where to start?**

Your high-schooler has worked hard on their essay and is soliciting the help of the individual(s) who they feel will give them the feedback they need. Be proud of their achievement and supportive of their journey of self discovery.

Leave it to your teen to decide what your role in this part of the application process will be. Honor your child. If they respond, "I got this", then take them at their word. Help to make the process feel less daunting. Be encouraging and celebrate each completed essay and application.

Stay out of the way, but be supportive. How do you do that? Simply let them know that you are there for them, should they need your help.

If you or your teen is an English language learner, remember that complex sentences and over-the-top descriptions don't matter. Encourage your teen to focus on content and clarity, and to tell a good story. That's what the admissions officer will remember.

Consider writing your own college essay. There's no better way to understand what your teen is going through than to put yourself through the same thing. Think back to an event or experience that was especially impactful in your life, and write about it. If you're really brave, share it with your student. You may learn a little yourself, and your teen may learn a little bit more about you.