

College Essay Writing

Summary

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Summary of Discussion Items

- Getting started
- Removing Stress
- Planning
- Purpose of College Essay
- Structure/Length
- Things to Include/Avoid

Getting Started

- Start Early
 - Consider the college essay an exercise in self-discovery
- The more work you can do now through September, the less stressful the process will be
- Brainstorm - spend time writing about the following. This may help you identify which essay prompt to address when the time comes.
 - Your best days
 - Worst days
 - Biggest Accomplishments
 - What inspires you
 - Strengths/Weaknesses
 - Goals
 - What's unique about you
 - Where you excel

Purpose of the College Essay

- Measures writing skills and a student's ability to think critically
 - How you answer the essay and write - allows college to focus on content and main points
 - Colleges are looking at:
 - Organization
 - Sentence structure
 - Spelling
 - Grammar
 - Punctuation
- Can offer a sense of a student's personality
 - Creativity
 - Experiences
 - interests
- Provides college admissions representative with insight into who the student is and how the student will fit into their academic and social community
- Allows student to share how they will fit into that school community

Structure & Format

- 5 paragraph essay
 - Thesis
 - 3 supporting paragraphs
 - Draw conclusion - finish strong with a decisive statement
 - Weak indecisive statements
 - Only time will tell...
 - That is a question we will all need to answer ourselves...
 - The world may never know...
- 2 pgs (500 words)
 - If the essay allows for up to 650 words, you do not need to write the maximum. Most essay responses can address the question in 500 words - about 1-2 pages.
- Shorter 250 word essay
 - 3 paragraphs
 - Introduction
 - Main paragraph
 - conclusion

Some colleges will specify the structure and format they want. If they do not, it is more open-ended

Important points

- Make point in a judicious way
- Do not write aimlessly
- Answer the question/prompt
- Be concise
- Can use humor if you are funny. Do not try out being humorous the first time in a college essay.
- Vary sentence length
 - Using variation in sentence structure helps keep the reader engaged and interested
- Critical writing versus movie making
 - Do not need to be unnecessarily descriptive or add unnecessary details

Things to Avoid

- Excessive dialogue
 - Takes up too much space
 - Can use dialogue, but be concise (short and powerful) to demonstrate context, emotion, etc.
- Negativity
 - Takes attention away from content
 - Admissions readers would rather see solutions than problems
 - Can take a negative experience and put a positive spin on it - how did you overcome something negative?
- Profanity
 - Can be distracting from main point and content
 - Huge risk
 - Use other vocabulary to get point across
 - Can be offensive/negative to admissions reader
- Run-on sentences
 - Main point often gets lost
- Big words
 - Important that the essay is the student's own voice
- Confrontational statements

Most used topics

- International Service Trips
- Sports
 - Injury
 - Overcoming injury
- Religious retreats

Not necessarily saying do not write about these topics, however, you want your essay to stand out and be memorable.

Biggest mistake this year...

Apart versus a part

PROOFREAD, PROOFREAD, PROOFREAD

Ask a few people to proofread your essay and provide feedback

Do not ask too many people, because once you make all of those edits, it can take away from the student's own voice

Common Application Main Essay Prompts 2021-2022

Below is the full set of essay prompts for 2021-2022.

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
2. The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
4. Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?
5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
7. Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

Other potential essay topics

- Some colleges may have supplemental essays or essays unique to their application
 - Write a story about yourself as a superhero for a day
 - What is your favorite word and why
 - You have just completed your 300-page autobiography. Please submit page 217
 - Describe a book, movie, song, or other work of art that has been significant to you since you were young and how its meaning has changed for you as you have grown
 - How do you feel about Wednesday
 - Find x
 - Dog and Cat. Coffee and Tea. Great Gatsby and Catcher in the Rye. Everyone knows there are two types of people in the world. What are they?
 - Don't write about reverse psychology

Essay resources

Some colleges may have open-ended questions or Topic of your Choice. If you have difficulty finding a topic to write about, review these resources:

<https://collegeadmissions.uchicago.edu/apply/uchicago-supplemental-essay-questions>

<https://apply.jhu.edu/application-process/essays-that-worked/>

Final Advice

- Practice, Practice, Practice
 - Spend time brainstorming and writing essays
 - Multiple Drafts/Revisions
- Make sure your voice is present in your essay response
- Is this me?
- Write about what you know
- Do not try to guess what the admissions representative wants to read
- Get inspiration - movies, books, television, music, friends, etc.