

APPLICATION ESSAY TIPS

What to Avoid:

- Avoid going overboard! Focus on writing about one example or experience and emphasize how it makes you a better college candidate.
- Keep your essay short and sweet. Aim for 500 words or fewer. Too many and you will distract yourself and your reader; too few and your reader will not know who you are.
- Be yourself. If you do not consider yourself to be very creative, avoid writing a creative essay. If you are creative, use it to your advantage.
- If you are bored, your reader will be too. Choose a topic that you have an answer to and that you find interesting. If you do not like your topic or your essay, it will show.
- Avoid copying how your friends or others are writing. Your essay needs to show who you are.
- Write appropriately. Remember that you are writing for professional adults who are looking for the best representatives of their college or university. Not all stories or experiences may be appropriate.
- What was the question? Make sure you are actually answering the writing prompt! It is very easy to get carried away and forget what you should be writing about.
- Words are a double-edged sword. Impressing your reader with a vast vocabulary is a great idea as long as you use the words correctly. Using a word incorrectly can have devastating consequences.
- Choose a tone and stick with it. If you are approaching your essay like a book report, make sure it sounds like a book report. If you are approaching your essay like a short story, make sure it sounds like a short story.
- Do not leave your essay to the last minute! The longer you have to prepare, the better your essay will be!
- Avoid contractions but write as naturally as possible.
- Avoid passive voice. You are telling your reader about something—be emphatic and final as you do!

What to Aim for:

- Be linear. Ensure your essay transitions logically to and from ideas and paragraphs.
- Keep your essay short and sweet. Aim for 500 words or fewer. Too many and you will distract yourself and your reader; too few and your reader will not know who you are.
- Add a hook, or attention-grabbing line, after you have written your essay. The first line is often the hardest to write yet definitely the most important to read.
- Read it aloud. Once you have a good draft of your essay, read it aloud to your friends and family. Ask them if the essay sounds like you. Reading it aloud will also help you catch things that may sound strange.
- Remember that you are the star. You may want to share an experience you had with someone else, but don't forget that your essay should be about you.
- This is no time for humility. Everyone has something unique to offer and has had unique experiences. Do not be afraid to toot your own horn and tell the world how awesome you are.
- You are only human. No one is perfect, so avoid making it sound as though you are. (Yes, we did just tell you to toot your own horn...in moderation.) Your college essay is an opportunity to show how you grow, learn, and experience.
- Always remember why you are applying to college. If you do not have a clear idea of why, your essay will not be clear either.