

Guidelines for Writing College Application Essays

1. Think about your topic and narrow it before you begin writing.
2. Write your first draft.
3. Put your essay away and don't touch it for at least 24 hours.
4. The goal of your essay is to teach the reader something about you as a person. You are unique. Be proud of it. Force yourself to put one or two elements of your unique personality into the essay. Use a personal story or example to support your ideas. If it is important to you, don't be afraid to put it in your essay.
5. Read your draft and answer the following questions: Are you bored? What stands out in your essay because it sounds good to you? Underline it and keep it. What doesn't sound as good? Put an "x" next to it and revise it later.
6. Read your first sentence again. Does it grab your reader? Rewrite the sentence if it doesn't hook the reader.
7. Reread the first sentence of each paragraph. Does each one relate to the previous idea and continue to pique your reader's interest? If not, revise it.
8. Underline every "I." Eliminate its overuse, particularly at the beginning of sentences.
9. Look for variety in the style and length of your sentences and paragraphs. If you don't find it, revise your essay to achieve it.
10. Consider your conclusion. If your ending is weak or boring, revise it to leave your reader with a good impression of you and your work.
11. Check for grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and sentence fragments.
12. Ask a parent, teacher, or a friend to read your draft for last-minute corrections.
13. Type your essay, if required, and proofread it carefully.
14. Put the essay in the mail and forget it. You've done your best.

What do colleges look for in a personal statement?

- Interest and experience in the applicant's intended major.
- Mention of any advanced placement or honors level courses taken in high school.
- Any state or national recognition for talent, creative abilities, leadership and academic achievement.
- Information about the applicant's ethnic or cultural background or age that would add diversity to campus.
- Any extenuating circumstances that significantly affected an otherwise good academic record. That could include the death of a parent or other close relative or an applicant's illness. [Do not submit a semester-by-semester scenario of why grades weren't as high as they should have been.]
- Any other information that would complete the applicant's profile.

"Personal statement counts – usually" from News-Gazette – November 27, 1997