

## **The Do's and Don'ts of Writing Your College Essay**

Do start early. Leave plenty of time to revise, reword, and rewrite. You can always improve on your presentation.

Do read the directions carefully. You will want to answer the question as directly as possible, and you'll want to follow word limits exactly. Express yourself as briefly and as clearly as you can.

Do tell the truth about yourself. The admission committee is anonymous to you: you are completely unknown to it. Even if you run into a committee member in the future, he will have no way of connecting your essay (out of the thousands he has read) to you.

Do focus on an aspect of yourself that will show your best side. You might have overcome some adversity, worked through a difficult project, or profited from a specific incident. A narrow focus is more interesting than broad-based generalizations.

Do feel comfortable in expressing anxieties. Everybody has them and it is good to know that an applicant can see them and face them.

Do tie yourself to the college. Be specific about what this particular school can do for you. Your essay can have different slants for different colleges.

Do speak positively. Negatives tend to turn people off.

Do write about your greatest assets and achievements. You should be proud of them!

Don't repeat information given elsewhere on your application. The committee has already seen it, and it looks like you have nothing better to say.

Don't write on general, impersonal topics like the nuclear arms race or the importance of good management in business. The college wants to know about you.

Don't use the personal statement to excuse your shortcomings. It would give them additional attention.

Don't use clichés.

Don't go to extremes: too witty, too opinionated, or too "intellectual".

## **The Worst Things You Can Do**

**Write a bad essay** – Some applications are perfect until you get to the essay. “Bad” essays include poor spelling and grammar, poorly constructed sentences or poor logic. Do not write about psychological illness or sex- admissions officers expect a mature essay. Choose a topic that reveals the real you, but don’t be risqué. Humorous essays are extremely difficult.

**Lie** – Do not give the admissions committee any reason to think that you are anything other than completely honest.

**Submit an incomplete application or leave out information** – It is not uncommon for 3%- 5% of applications to top colleges to be incomplete. It is often an automatic rejection. A college may notify you of incomplete information by a postcard, but they will not hunt you down. The bottom line is that only the applicant is responsible for his application. Examples of incomplete applications are missing lines or signatures, missing SAT or ACT scores, missing or incomplete essays.

**Be sloppy** - Perhaps a misspelled word, and unchecked box or hastily or poorly answered question. If you submit a sloppy application colleges may infer that they are not a serious choice. A sloppy application also smacks of immaturity. Rushing applications before the deadline is one way to increase your chances of messy applications. Do not simply trust software, proofread. Also have a trusted teacher proofread your application.

**Slack off senior year**

### **Remember**

The personal statement is yours. If it looks like Madison Avenue, the admission committee will probably assume that it is your mother’s or your father’s, or their secretaries’.

A “gimmick” essay rarely goes anywhere. The committee is amused, but unimpressed with your candidacy.

Write a serious essay, from the bottom of your heart, in the most mature manner possible.