

## TIPS ON WRITING A COLLEGE APPLICATION ESSAY

### Goals:

- To give the admissions staff a better understanding, beyond your transcript, test scores, and a list of activities, of who you are as an individual and how you may contribute to the campus community.
- To show the depth of interest and passion you may have in an area.
- To paint a picture of who you are interpersonally and intrapersonally.
- To explain something significant about yourself that we wouldn't otherwise know.
- Possibly to show your reader that you can think logically and analytically.
- To set yourself apart from the many other applicants who will apply with equally good academic histories, scores, and recommendations.

### It's just common sense to:

- Comply with the requests of the application (essay length, format, topic, etc.).
- Type your essay.
- Double space your essay (so much easier to read).
- Answer the question.
- Send the correct essay in with the correct application.
- Write your own essay.

### Remember:

- This is the portion of your application that is totally under your immediate control.
- Your personality and character should be reflected in your essay.
- What makes you special may not, in your eyes, seem profound but will be meaningful and authentic.

### Do:

- Choose an appropriate topic.
- Remember your audience.
- Choose something "real" to write about; something you feel strongly about and are knowledgeable about.
- Make sure your essay sounds like you; write in your own voice.
- Be "specific, passionate, and true to life."
- Proofread: Do not rely on your spell-check to catch errors of syntax and homonym; be sure your essay makes sense.
- Have someone else (competent in English) proofread your essay for errors.
- Have someone else (knowledgeable in who you are as a person) read your essay. Does your reader think your essay reflects who you are?
- Listen to someone read your essay aloud. Does it sound like you?

- Focus on the chosen topic. Reflect enough on what you have to say so that you exhibit some depth.
- Feel free to be provocative or funny if that is who you truly are.
- If focusing on another person and his or her life, make sure that you indicate in detail and in a reflective way how that person has influenced *your* life.
- If you choose to focus on an event in your past, make sure it has relevance to who you are now.  
Make the connection for your reader as to how and why this past event may have been a “turning point” for you.

**Hints to help you get started:**

- Stop stressing out. Just get started by writing *something*.
- Remember that there is no one formula for success.
- Identify your interests and passions.
- Identify your strengths.
- Be yourself.
- Spend some time journaling or writing spontaneously on a variety of topics:
  - “My mother/father/guardian says that I always....”
  - “My best friend would say that I....”
  - Write an introduction of yourself to your college roommate.
  - List as many adjectives as you can to describe yourself.
  - In what special ways do others see you contributing to your family, school, and community?

**For more information**, contact the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, Washington University, Campus Box 1089, One Brookings Drive, St. Louis, MO 63130-4800.  
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