



The College Essay

Most selective colleges require you to submit an essay or personal statement as part of your application.

It may sound like a chore, and it will certainly take a substantial amount of work. But it's also a unique opportunity that can make a difference at decision time. Admissions committees put the most weight on your high

school grades and your test scores. However, selective colleges receive applications from many worthy students with similar scores and grades—too many to admit. So they use your essay, along with your letters of recommendation and extracurricular activities, to find out what sets you apart from the other talented candidates.

Telling Your Story to Colleges

So what does set you apart?

You have a unique background, interests and personality. This is your chance to tell your story (or at least part of it). The best way to tell your story is to write a personal, thoughtful essay about something that has meaning for you. Be honest and genuine, and your unique qualities will shine through.

Admissions officers have to read an unbelievable number of college essays, most of which are forgettable. Many students try to sound smart rather than sounding like themselves. Others write about a subject that they don't care about, but that they think will impress admissions officers.

You don't need to have started your own business or have spent the summer hiking the Appalachian Trail. Colleges are simply looking for thoughtful, motivated students who will add something to the first-year class.

Tips for a Stellar College Application Essay

1. Write about something that's important to you.

It could be an experience, a person, a book—anything that has had an impact on your life.

2. Don't just recount—reflect!

Anyone can write about how they won the big game or the summer they spent in Rome. When recalling these events, you need to give more than the play-by-play or itinerary. Describe what you learned from the experience and how it changed you.

3. Being funny is tough.

A student who can make an admissions officer laugh never gets lost in the shuffle. But beware. What you think is funny and what an adult working in a college thinks is funny are probably different. We caution against one-liners, limericks and anything off-color.

4. Start early and write several drafts.

Set it aside for a few days and read it again. Put yourself in the shoes of an admissions officer: Is the essay interesting? Do the ideas flow logically? Does it reveal something about the applicant? Is it written in the applicant's own voice?

Excerpted from <http://www.princetonreview.com/college/essay.aspx>