

The College Essay

Most college-bound students approach the task of writing a personal essay for college admissions with some trepidation and a few questions:

- How important is the essay?
- What do colleges look for?
- How is it used?
- Who reads it?

If you are such a student, a few facts and tips may put the essay into perspective and help you produce your best effort.

First of all, the essay is important - to you and to the college. According to one admissions director:

"It makes the facts in the student's folder come alive for us. Because it is the student's personal statement, no single piece of admissions evidence gets as much attention and provokes as much discussion."

The essay is your opportunity to take charge of the information the college receives about you, and to provide information that does not appear in grades, test scores, and other materials. It allows you to reveal your intelligence, talents, sense of humor, enthusiasm, maturity, creativity, expressiveness, sincerity, and writing ability - traits that count in the admissions evaluation.

What Do Colleges Look For?

Generally speaking, the admissions staff will evaluate your application essay on three levels:

- ✍ **LEVEL 1:** Your ability to use standard English that is correctly written, typed, punctuated, and contains correct grammar, usage, and syntax.

- ✍ **LEVEL 2:** Your ability to think about yourself and to convey your true feelings or opinions about a topic through content, substance, and depth of insight.

- ✍ **LEVEL 3:** Creativity and originality.

Start your essay now and have it proofread.

In the Essay directions, a college may ask you to do one or more of the following:

DESCRIBE your unique qualities as a person, or tell something about yourself that can't be learned from other information in your application.

DISCUSS something that has contributed significantly to your growth.

COMMENT on your goals and aspirations and tell how you expect the college to help you meet them.

EXPRESS your imagination, originality, opinions, or feelings on a specific topic.

Whatever the topic, the care and attention you give it will express the level of your motivation and how much you care about the college.

Tip: Write to different prompts, about different topics, and from different perspectives. Write several drafts before deciding on the one that illustrates your personality and strengths the best.