

The College Admissions Essay

Do:

- Take the essay very seriously. The readers do; it is a very important part of the admissions process.
- Follow the directions for the essay. This is extremely important. Pay attention to length, and if you are asked to answer a question or prompt, do so.
- Write an opening sentence that will make the reader want to read the rest of the essay. They read thousands; make your first sentence stick with them.
- Write multiple drafts.
- Choose a selected few trusted mentors to read your drafts and offer feedback.
- Check carefully for grammar and spelling errors. Check again.
- Be concise. Say what you mean in as few well-chosen words as possible.
- Make your essay reflective and individualized. Tell a story that only you can tell.
- Stick to one topic.
- Be honest and authentic. The reader should hear your voice, not a voice you think they want to hear.
- Show (don't tell) by providing relevant, interesting examples.

Don't:

- Procrastinate. You should give this essay time to develop through multiple revisions.
- Plagiarize.
- Repeat information that appears elsewhere in your application.
- Think that you do not have anything important or interesting to write about. Everyone has a story.
- Be a victim or blame others for setbacks you have encountered.
- Be overly philosophical or attempt to solve all of the world's problems in your essay.
- Go off topic. Check as you write to be sure you are following the essay prompt.
- Overshare. Though this is a personal essay, it is also serious academic exercise. Be very careful about sharing very intimate personal information, especially if it is irrelevant to the topic.