

College Essay Lesson

Presented by: School Counselors

Wednesday March 18th, 2015

What is the purpose of a College Essay?

- The National Association for College Admission Counseling's 2011 State of College Admission report found that while grades, strength of curriculum and admission test scores are the top factors in the college admission decision, a majority of colleges and universities believe the essay to be of considerable or moderate importance in determining which academically qualified students they would choose.
- When all else is equal between competing applicants, a compelling essay can make the difference. A powerful, well-written essay can turn a "maybe" into an "acceptance."

An Admissions Dean Offers Advice on Writing a College Essay-NY Times Article (Tips)

Write about yourself

Use your own voice

Focus on one aspect of yourself

Be genuine

TELL A GOOD STORY

Don't repeat what is already in your application

Don't rely on "how to" books

Consider a mundane topic

Share your opinions, but avoid risky or controversial

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What are college admissions officers looking for when they read student essays?

Let's Discuss!

“During the summer before my junior year of high school, I spent a weekend volunteering with the poor in post-Katrina Louisiana and realized that I am privileged. Most of what these people had, had been ripped out from under them and life was very different there from my life in suburban Massachusetts. Amazingly, though, these people still seemed fulfilled. I learned from this experience that money isn't everything.”

- Do you think this essay will meet the expectations we just listed?
- Does this paragraph grab you?
- Are you interested in reading more of this essay?
- What do you think this paragraph says about this student?

Admissions Committee Review

- *Imagine that each of these essay writers has applied for admission to their college or university. Each group is responsible for using the handout to evaluate the essay and decide whether to admit this student. They should assume that each student has a similarly strong profile in terms of grades, test scores, activities and recommendations.*
- *Sample Essay #1*
- *Sample Essay # 2 and 3*

Group Findings/Class Discussion

- How were these essays different from the excerpt with which we began?
- In what ways were essays identified as stronger, more effective?
- What does it mean to be cliché?
- How did the essay avoid that trap?
- Is there a way to move the experience detailed in the opening essay beyond cliché?
- After considering these essays, what else should we add to our list about what college admissions officials are looking for in student essays?

2014-2015 Common Application Essay Options

- Some students have a background or story that is so central to their identity that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
- Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what lessons did you learn?
- Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?
- Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?
- Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

“Do’s and Don'ts of College Essay Writing”

- **Do** find a creative angle in writing the focus of your essay.
- **Don't** be tempted to write what you think the admission officers want to hear; answer the question honestly.

- **Don't** simply state a fact to get an idea across, such as “I like to surround myself with people with a variety of backgrounds and interests.”
- **Do** include specific details, examples, reasons and so on to develop your ideas. For the example above, describe a situation when you were surrounded by various types of people. What were you doing? Whom did you talk with? What did you take away from the experience?
- **Do** show your draft to family, counselor and teachers. Ask if it makes sense and sounds like you. Consider their feedback and make changes, but keep your voice. High school senior Dana warns, "Make sure the essay is in your own voice. If at some point you read over your essay and you hear your mother's voice, something is wrong."
- **Don't** turn your essay in without proofreading it, and don't rely only on your computer's spell check to catch mistakes. A spell-check program will miss typos like these: "*After I graduate form high school, I plan to get a summer job.*" "*From that day on, Daniel was my best fried.*"
- **Do** read your essay over carefully to check for typos and spelling and grammar errors. It's best to ask someone who hasn't seen it yet to take a look as well. They're likely to see mistakes you won't catch.
- **Do** pick a topic that will highlights who you are. No matter what question you're asked, admission officers want to learn more about you through the essay.

Next week!

- Day 9 - March 25th Common Application/Financial Aid (Financial Aid Presentation)
- Counselor to give overview of Common Application Brief Overview of the financial aid process (FAFSA) -Websites -Scholarships -Net Price Calculator
Completion of past assignments
- Homework: Complete any outstanding items on checklist