

COLLEGE APPLICATION WRITING REQUIREMENTS

This is one of your greatest opportunities to be heard by the members of the admissions committee. This is your chance to honestly portray who you are. Therefore, time should be taken before you compose your personal thoughts and feelings. The admissions committee is not only judging you by the content of your response, but also by your use of English and your ability to express yourself. It is recommended that you ask to have your essay read by a school counselor and proofread by a teacher. Here are some things to consider when writing your essay.

- Write your OWN essay in your OWN voice- students do not ordinarily use “theretofore” in their essays. Admissions officers can easily spot an essay that is too polished and not a student’s own writing.
- Don’t try to second guess the essay and write what you think they want to hear. Be honest, creative and thoughtful. This is one way the admission committee can gauge who you are, how you think and if you are a match for their school. Many prompts and questions are autobiographical in nature. Do not disown yourself by evading what is often times the subject- YOU.
- Take creative risks, but be sure it is done correctly. Feel free to appropriately display your sense of humor, intellectual curiosity, interesting experiences or personal perspectives. Be who you are- if you are funny, be funny. If you are not, don’t try to be. Admissions officers read thousands of essays, and it is refreshing when an applicant does something different; just make sure it is it appropriate and accomplishes the given task.
- Write clearly, concisely and to the prompt. Do not use the essay for numerous schools if it doesn’t fit their prompt. Write to the actual college- be sure to make sure you send the right essay to the right college.
- Make sure the essay has been proofread and edited- it is a reflection of you the student and person.
- It is not about telling them who you are, but **showing** them what you have done. Create the story for them, bring it alive and invite them to be part of the personal experience. Explain that “ah-ha” moment where something significant resonated with you and challenged or perhaps even changed your pattern of thinking.
- Use details from your college visit to specify how you would benefit most from and contribute the most to that particular college.

Remember that the admissions committee is trying to “get to know you” through your application, and the essay is considered the most valuable tool. A neatly typed and accurately expressed essay will communicate to an admissions office that your interest is genuine. The essay itself must be your own work, but you are encouraged to solicit constructive criticism of your grammar and written expression before submitting your application. There are several resources for essay writing. Some colleges, such as Connecticut College, will post a sample of strong essays that managed to catch their attention and “grab” the reader. When charged with the task of writing the college essay, consider using the Essay Writing Process.

The Essay Writing Process

To write a college essay, use the exact same three-step process you would use to write an essay for class: first prewrite, then draft, and finally edit. This process will help you identify a focus for your essay, and gather the details you'll need to support it.

Prewriting- To begin, you must first collect and organize potential ideas for your essay's focus. Since all essay questions are attempts to learn about you, begin with YOU.

- **Brainstorm**

Set a timer for 15 minutes and make a list of your strengths and outstanding characteristics. Focus on strengths of personality, not things you've done. For example, you are responsible (not an "Eagle Scout") or committed (not "played basketball"). If you keep drifting toward events rather than characteristics, make a second list of the things you've done, places you've been, accomplishments you're proud of; use them for the activities section of your application.

- **Discover Your Strengths**

Do a little research about yourself: ask parents, friends, and teachers what your strengths are.

- **Create a "Self-Outline"**

Now, next to each trait, list five or six pieces of evidence from your life— things you've been or done—that prove your point.

- **Find Patterns and Connections**

Look for patterns in the material you've brainstormed by grouping similar ideas and events together. For example, does your passion for numbers show up in your performance in the state math competition and your summer job at the computer store? Was basketball about sports or about friendships? When else have you stuck with the hard work to be with people who matter to you?

Drafting- Now it's time to get down to the actual writing. Write your essay in three basic parts: introduction, body, and conclusion.

- The introduction gives your reader an idea of your essay's content. It can shrink when you need to be concise. One vivid sentence might do: "The favorite science project was a complete failure."
- The body presents the evidence that supports your main idea. Use narration and an incident to show rather than tell.
- The conclusion can be brief as well, a few sentences to nail down the meaning of the events and incidents you have described.

Editing- When you have a good final draft, it's time to make improvements, find and correct any errors, and get someone to give you feedback. Remember, you are not always your best editor. However, no one can speak for you; your own words and ideas are your best bet.

- **Let It Cool-** Take a break from your work and come back to it in a few days. Does your main idea come across clearly? Do you prove your points with specific details? Is your essay easy to read aloud?
- **Feedback Time-** Have someone you like and trust (but someone likely to tell you the truth) read your essay. Ask them to tell you what they think you're trying to convey. Did they get it right?
- **Edit Down-** Your language should be simple, direct, and clear. This is a personal essay, not a

term paper. Make every word count (e.g. if you wrote "in society today," consider changing that to "now").

- **Proofread Two More Times**- Careless spelling or grammatical errors, awkward language, or fuzzy logic will make your essay memorable — in a bad way.