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How to write a college essay that wows admissions officers.

Craft an application essay or personal statement that stands out.

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[How to begin writing your college essay](#)

[How to format your college essay and what to include](#)

[How to make any college essay shine](#)

What should a college essay have?

- A clear beginning, middle, and end
- Your personality, front and center
- A logical flow that shows how you think
- A moment of reflection that shows what's important to you
- Perfect spelling, grammar, and formatting

[How to begin writing your college essay.](#)

Test scores matter. High school extracurricular activities matter too. But a great college application essay can be the thing that puts your application over the top. (It can also give you good practice for [writing cover letters](#) for future internships and jobs.) With your essay, you can show the admissions committee who you are, how you think, what you're capable of, and how lucky their school would be to have an interesting person like you in attendance.

Quick tips

- Start writing down ideas now — don't judge them, just write.
- Share your personality and passion.
- If you're stuck, start by answering basic questions and seeing where those take you.



Start early.

A college personal statement is not a night-before kind of assignment. If you have more free time in the summer between your junior and senior year than you do when school is in session, spend some of that time brainstorming and then drafting your essay. The best essay writing comes out of multiple drafts — even the best writers don't get it right the first time — so give yourself plenty of time to choose from the many college essay topics and start writing the first draft. Then you'll have time to revise those words into an engaging story before the submission deadline.

Be yourself.

Whether you're filling out the common application, which works for over 1,000 colleges, or college-specific applications, check out the essay prompts and choose one that speaks to you or makes you think of something you're passionate about. All of the common application prompts ask you to talk about yourself, your life experience, or a person close to you. No matter which you choose, think about what others might be interested to learn about you.

Answer some questions.

If you're still stuck, search for college essay examples online and read a few to get a sense of what works. You can also try writing down your answers to the following questions: What's your favorite activity? What's the most difficult thing you've ever done or your biggest failure? How did you deal with it? Did the experience help develop your [hard or soft skills](#)? Who has influenced you the most in your life?

Trust that you can do it.

You don't have to be a great writer to write a great college essay. Yes, you should avoid typos or grammatical mistakes, but the best essays aren't about showing off amazing writing skills. They're about revealing aspects of the applicant that grades and test scores don't capture. Be sure to speak in your own voice (don't try to squeeze in all of your SAT words) and avoid repeating information that's already present in other parts of your application.



How to format your college essay and what to include.

Once you have some ideas written down, you can think about structure. Pay attention to word count. The sweet spot for a college admissions essay is somewhere between 500 and 650 words, which gives you just enough room to show who you are and what you think.

Quick tips

- Make sure to check and follow the college's formatting instructions.
- Stay focused on the story you want to tell.
- Reflect on your experience and what it means to you.

Keep the formatting clean.

Stick to the college's guidelines. You don't need a title, but you should make sure your paragraphs are indented and your lines are double-spaced. Avoid using italics or bold font, which may not show up if you're submitting your essay in a text box online.

If you plan to submit your essay as an attachment, the font should be 12-point Times New Roman. The lines should be double-spaced, and the margins should be one inch all the way around. Number each page in the header or footer with your last name and the page number.



Tell a single story.

If there's one specific event or experience you want to cover in your college admissions essay, focus on that. Consider the most important parts — the necessary details — and include only those. Try to be specific and clear in your descriptions. Ask yourself if it makes sense to start at the beginning, or if you want to create a little suspense by starting at the point of greatest tension. Then catch your readers up on what they need to know before you resolve the tension.

Be sure to give yourself plenty of room to explain what you did to overcome the obstacle or meet the challenge, and to reflect on the significance of the experience for you. What did you learn? How did it change you? It helps if your conclusion subtly demonstrates that you're a thoughtful, kind, community-oriented person who would make a great classmate.

Build on a theme.

Maybe there isn't a single narrative you want to follow. Instead, you want to offer a thesis and back it up with examples or share a few anecdotes that you tie together at the end. You can write about the most influential people in your life and how they shaped you, or maybe you pursue an unusual extracurricular activity you can write about in a way that illuminates your personality, passions, and goals.

In these types of essays, demonstrate how you think, the connections you can make between seemingly unrelated concepts, the meaning that you make out of your own life, and what you hope for the future. Here, your reflection will do most of the work.



How to make any college essay shine.

These tips can help you improve your admissions essay and get into your dream school, but they can also help you improve any type of writing project.

1. Read it out loud.

When you read your writing out loud, you catch clunky phrases, run-on sentences, and typos. If you can read it out loud without getting tripped up, your readers will be able to sail through it too.

2. Share it with people.

Whether you reach out to family members, friends, or a favorite teacher, get feedback from people you trust. They might spot something you missed or suggest an opportunity to expand or draw a connection you hadn't thought of.

You can share your essay with your readers by [converting to PDF](#) and sharing with a link or by email. Your readers can add comments right in the document, and you can even add deadlines for the procrastinators.

3. Revise and proofread.

Take a couple of days to consider the feedback you get from your readers. (Sometimes our first reactions are defensive, but the next day we may see the logic in other points of view.) Take the feedback that makes sense to you — you can [annotate the PDF](#) yourself — and leave the rest.

Before you give it the final proofread, let your essay sit for a day or two. You may catch any last typos or formatting issues you missed the last time.

4. Convert the final version to PDF.

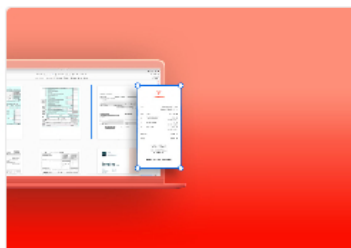
Once you've proofread it one more time, you can convert your essay to PDF to submit as an attachment. With a PDF, you can be sure your formatting will stay consistent no matter who's reading your essay or what device or software they're using.

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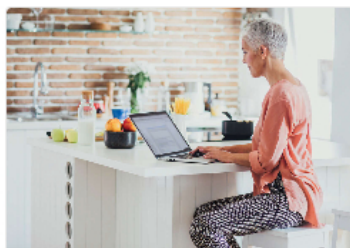
The college application process can be stressful and competitive. Just remember that, as your personal essay probably demonstrates, you're resilient and brave, you have a sharp mind and a big heart, and you're going to do great things. Enjoy your school experience, because before you know it, you'll find yourself wondering [what to do after college](#).

Keep exploring



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What to do after college: 4 options for your next move.

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