

5^{1/2} Steps to Writing a College Admissions Essay

1. Write in Your Own Voice

No matter what the essay question is, you can express who you are by answering in your voice. Avoid common tactics of trying to sound overly intellectual. Simply showing that you can use the English language, follow directions and articulate who you are will go far.

1½. Know What Your Voice Is

Your voice is distinctly yours. Recognize the qualities that distinguish you from others. **What are three qualities that make you stand out from others?**

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2. Don't Repeat Yourself: Don't Be Repetitive

Your essay should tell admission representatives something they haven't already read in your application. **What are three things the admission representatives won't know about you until they read your essay?**

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If any of these three things match any of the qualities in section 1½, that should tell you what you need to get across to the admission representative!

3. Give Yourself Enough Time to Write, Revise and Repeat

The writing process takes time, so give yourself enough of it. Before you even write, just brainstorm ideas. From there, craft an outline, and from there write a draft. Have someone like a parent, teacher or friend edit your essay. Take your editor's suggestions, make changes and rework the piece. Here's a checklist for writing your college admission essay:

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|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brainstorm | <input type="checkbox"/> Edit |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Outline | <input type="checkbox"/> Revise |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Draft | |

4. Are You Answering the Right Question?

With the stress of writing an essay, a lot of times the main point of the essay goes out the window. Remember, you need to answer the question the college asked. Even if you have the most beautifully written essay on your ability to talk to dogs, are you sure it answers the question? For every essay you write, re-read the question and double check that you have provided an appropriate response.

5. Get Some Mileage Out of It

Essay questions may be different for each school, but in many cases you can use what you already have toward another question. It's not as simple as copy and paste, but you can repurpose parts of your essay to make sense with a new question. Still, remember section 4! Make sure that your repurposed essay answers the question. Also, avoid at all costs accidentally leaving the wrong college's name in your essay.

All of these steps take time. Do yourself a favor and start your essays early!