

How to Write a Great College Essay

Writing a college essay is the most challenging part of the application process. I remember finding it difficult to explain who I was on two pieces of paper. It was especially difficult figuring out what to write about. For those of you who are not seniors yet, it is never too early to start thinking about essay topics. It will make your lives much easier once you get to senior year.

The college essay is an ongoing process for the students I work with. For some, it takes two topics and 10 drafts to finally get to the end product, while for others, it takes one topic and three drafts. Either way, it is a lot of work!

You can make the process easier by choosing a topic that is important to you and that you are passionate about. The essay topic should also say something about you that cannot be found, or isn't explicit, elsewhere in the application.

I look at writing the essay as a three-part project: Brainstorming, Writing and Editing.

Brainstorming

Most students do not know what we want to write about or how to start. That is why brainstorming is a crucial part of the process. A strategy I have found very useful is asking yourself questions these questions:

- What is your background and what are some of your experiences?
- What is most important to you?
- What are your aspirations?
- What are you passionate about?
- Then, narrow down potential topics even more by asking these specific questions:
 - If you were to write an autobiography, which 7-10 events would be included?
 - What are your 3-5 biggest accomplishments over the last four years?
 - Which five extracurricular activities are most important to you?
 - Which three people do you admire most?

Writing

Once you have identified a topic, think about why you chose it. You need to decide on the point you are trying to make, and how you are going to make it. One way to get your point across is through the use of specific details and stories. Personal experiences can help to validate the statement you are making.

Additionally, most of the students I work with struggle with writing too much or too little. I tell them to write too much, if necessary, because it is much easier to cut down an essay than add to it. So, write your heart out! Get your message across and then worry about the word limit. As long as the essay is two pages, double spaced, size 12 font, you should be fine.

Editing

PROOFREAD! PROOFREAD! PROOFREAD! Editing the essay tends to be the bulk of the writing process. Ask two or three caring adults to read your essay and provide feedback. If you don't have someone in mind, send it to me! And be open to people's suggestions for improvement.

That said, I hope all you seniors have started this most time-consuming part of the college application process!