

TIPS FOR WRITING ESSAYS AND PERSONAL STATEMENTS

Goal:

To write statements that honestly represent who you are and what you are capable of, so you will be seen as a unique, capable and success-oriented person. Your statements must get, and hold, the reader's attention.

Do's and Don'ts:

Do's

1. Before writing, outline your goals, passions, assets and accomplishments, as well as the meaningful ways other people and events have influenced you. A resume format works well.
2. Read the instructions and questions carefully and follow them exactly. Answer the questions directly!
3. Show you are unique or different, either in your qualities, experiences or writing style.
4. The most important sentence is the first. It is the "hook". Polish it so it shines. Anecdotes are effective.
5. Consider making your opening sentence a paraphrase of your concluding statement.
6. Express your main thoughts in the opening paragraph. Don't ramble!
7. Be as brief as possible, yet very clear. Use personal examples whenever possible.
8. Tell the truth who you are/are not. Be sincere. Be yourself.
9. Come across as a person who has had a variety of meaningful experiences.
10. Convey (via examples) how you have coped with adversity as well as successes.
11. Emphasize what you have learned from these, as well as other, experiences.
12. Especially for personal statements, tie yourself to the college. Understand the college's mission statement by asking or by reading its catalog. Why are you interested in attending the college, and what can the college do for you, and vice-versa?? In other words, be sure to show there is a good "match".
13. Convey your understanding of how the college considers itself unique or outstanding.
14. Be upbeat and avoid the negatives such as, "I want to attend your college so I won't have to take math".
15. Make copies of everything.

Don'ts

1. Don't force it, be too funny, too sad, too cute, too silly. Get to the point!
2. Don't repeat things that are covered in other parts of the application.
3. Don't let modesty cover up your greatest assets and accomplishments.
4. Don't be afraid to express your anxieties or indecisiveness. Be direct and unapologetic. College admissions people like to help and appreciate your revealing a human side.
5. Don't try to save the world. Avoid the social-problem-of-the-day, 9/11, and other trendy topics if possible.

Additional Tips:

1. Practice writing essays during the 11th grade. Excellent sources for questions are the Common Application and either current or old college applications.
2. Try to visit each college before writing your essays and personal statements.

BE SURE TO HAVE ANOTHER PERSON REVIEW ALL OF YOUR WORK BEFORE YOU SUBMIT IT.

Excellent Resources:

1. NAASP (Common Application). Four excellent essay practice questions. <http://www.commonapp.org>
2. Bauld, H. "On Writing the College Application Essay". Essay tips for elite colleges. Barnes & Noble.
3. Burnham, A. "Essays That Will Get You Into College". Harper Collins, Publishing
4. Ripple, G. "Tips on Writing Essays for College Admission and Scholarships". Octameron Associates.
5. Strunk, W. and White, E.B.. "The Elements of Style". MacMillan Publishing.
6. UC-Berkeley. <http://uga.berkeley.edu/apa/personalstatement>
7. The College Board. <http://www.collegeboard.com>. See index.