

COLLEGE ADMISSION ESSAYS

Some colleges require essays as well as an application for admission. Practice below with some of the most common essay prompts. If your college(s) of interest do not require admission essays, use this to practice for scholarship essays.

Tell us about yourself.

TIP: This is your moment to tell a story about yourself that goes beyond grades & your ACT/SAT score. Instead of putting everything out there about yourself, focus on just a few things.

Why do you want to attend this college?

TIP: Make sure the college provides your major & provides activities of interest to you. Be honest about why you want to attend the college, avoiding too much flattery of the college.

Think of a time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what lessons did you learn?

TIP: This is an example of a “creative question” type of essay prompt. The key is to show your personality through this essay. Avoid going overboard on creativity, making the essay more of a fantasy rather than sharing about yourself.

What are your career plans and how will you use your degree?

TIP: First make sure your college(s) of interest offer your major. Show the connection on how your degree will help you meet your career goals.

What contributions have you made to your community?

TIP: Show how your involvement in your community has shaped you to be who you are today.

Essay Writing Tips

A great application essay presents a vivid, personal, and compelling view of you to the admissions committee. It rounds out the rest of your application and helps you stand out from other applicants. The essay is one of the only parts of the application over which you have complete control, so take the time to do a good job on it.

Following are some tips to help you as you write your essay:

- Write simply.
- Keep your focus narrow and personal.
- Provide specific evidence (facts, events, quotations, examples) to support your main idea.
- Use vivid, compelling details (show, don't tell).
- Address the topic squarely. For example, if an application asks you to explain any deficiencies in records (e.g., a low grade or bad semester), provide a straightforward, reasonable response.
- Don't repeat information that is found elsewhere in the application, such as lists of courses or extracurricular activities.
- Write about something unique and different—not just what you think the admissions officer wants to hear (they read many essays about the charms of their university, for example).
- Apply principles of good composition (e.g., organize the essay with a beginning, middle, and end).
- Structure your writing in a way that allows the reader to draw his or her own conclusions.
- Revise and proofread to make sure there are no typographical, spelling, or grammatical errors.

Source: Tips adapted from the *College Counseling Sourcebook* (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 2004) based on information from *The College Application Essay*, rev. ed., by Sarah Myers McGinty (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 2004).

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Practice essay prompts adapted from: <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/guidance/applications/essay>.

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