How to Write a Great College Admissions or Scholarship Essay

1) It is important to always keep in mind what the purpose of a college essay is.
   • Colleges want to gauge your academic preparedness and how you will fit into their college.
   • Think “What do I have to offer this community?”

2) It’s about how you write, not a specific topic
   • Be thoughtful, vulnerable, honest, unique, most importantly be YOU! This is how colleges learn about you without the “numbers” (GPAs & test scores). Let your personality shine through!
   • Make yourself stand out! Remember to keep it positive.

3) Follow directions! Make sure you are answering ALL parts of the prompt.
   • Pay attention to what the question is asking, cover all parts of it
   • Make sure you stay within the page/word limit as well as follow the format requests

4) Write your best!
   • This is going to be one of the first impressions colleges get of you, show off your writing abilities!
   • Proofread! This is great practice for the professional world as well! Always proofread what you are writing. Have a friend, parent, teacher, coach, look over your essays as well – it’s always good to have a second set of eyes!
   • Be prepared to go through many drafts! The more people who review it the better.

5) Keep in mind, you have an audience.
   • It can be tough to remember you’re writing an essay for someone when you have never met them.
   • It’s okay to write about things that matter to you, but remember that you don’t know the politics, religion, or personal beliefs of the person reading your essay.
   • Choose a topic that interests you, but that would not offend someone.
   • Remember the first paragraph is VERY important. This is how you engage the reader and interest them in reading further.

6) Save yourself time by reusing your essays.
   • Many colleges have similar prompts, edit and proofread your essays carefully to match the criteria for the new college application.
7) Ideas to think about for your essay
   • Reflect on your past and think ahead to your future goals. What do you want to do with your degree after you graduate? Long-term goals?
   • Was there a specific instance that started your interest in a field/major?
   • How has your interest changed over time with your personal experiences?
   • What do you possess that will help with your success in this field? Talk about your characteristics or skills.
   • What makes you unique compared to others? Talk about your background, life experiences, or personality traits.
   • Have you overcome any major challenges in your life that contributed to your development?
   • Have you completed any academic research or projects you want to share? What would you contribute to the academic community in this field?

8) Font size should be 11 or 12 and simple font such as Times New Roman or Arial

**DOs and DON’Ts for Great Essays from the UO Admissions Team**

1. **DO use the spelling and grammar checker on your computer as you write!** Then ask a counselor or teacher for feedback and corrections.

2. **DO use your own experiences!** Writing about a brother’s friend’s illness is probably not the best essay topic unless you yourself were also personally affected.

3. **Avoid over-generalizing!** Don’t make claims that can’t be backed up. For example, the phrases “most people” or “everyone knows” don’t share anything about your personal thoughts, feelings, and values.

4. Don’t recycle essays you used for school—we can tell.

5. The essay is not a place to reiterate the rest of your application. **Write about something unique and that we do not know about you already from your application.**

6. **Avoid being too general or broad.** Be specific and get deeper.

7. **Avoid using clichés or quote.** Use your own words, feelings, emotions, etc. Make sure it is personal to you.
8. We look for essays that express originality, growth, creativity, authenticity, motivation, and we value depth and not breadth.

9. DO double check to make sure you answered the prompt! DON’T get off track--decide what you want to write about and work backwards from there.

10. Have fun with it! This is a time for you to let your voice be heard and for you to let yourself shine.

**Common Application Essay Examples**

The essay demonstrates your ability to write clearly and concisely on a selected topic and helps you distinguish yourself in your own voice. What do you want the readers of your application to know about you apart from courses, grades, and test scores? Choose the option that best helps you answer that question and write an essay of no more than 650 words, using the prompt to inspire and structure your response. Remember: 650 words is your limit, not your goal. Use the full range if you need it, but don’t feel obligated to do so. (The application won’t accept a response shorter than 250 words.)

Select from the following:

Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?

Describe a problem you’ve solved or a problem you’d like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma – anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taking to identify a solution.
Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you’ve already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

**OSAC & Other Scholarship Essay Sample Topics**

**Personal Statement questions:**

1. What are your specific educational plans and career goals and why? What inspires you to achieve them?
2. What have you done for your family or community that you care about the most and why?
3. Describe a personal accomplishment and the strengths and skills you used to achieve it.
4. Describe a significant change or experience that has occurred in your life. How did you respond and what did you learn about yourself?

**Experience in Diverse Environments**

Some scholarships which require an extra essay about living or working in diverse environments. Such factors may include:

- socioeconomic or educational disadvantage;
- demonstrated experience with or commitment to serving or working with historically underserved or underprivileged populations, such as members of minority communities;
- being in the first generation of a family to attend college;
- geographic diversity, including students from rural or inner-city areas that might be underrepresented on campus.